THE FERROL FAMILY:

AND

OTHER TALES OF DOMESTIC LIFE.

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THE FERROL FAMILY.

A WIFE'S STORY.

THE FERROL FAMILY;

OR,

"KEEPING UP APPEARANCES."

CHAPTER I.

A BUBBLE IN THE BEST SOCIETY

WHILE, in the country, primroses and cowslips are decking the fields, and hedgerows are white with the summer-snow of interminable bloom; while bright skies look down upon the new-clad woods in their profuse green garb, and echo with lark songs over silken meadows; while the air is pure with spring sunshine, and sweet with perfume from a thousand flowers, and musical with myriad voices of awakened life; then begins the London season, amid dust, and heat, and turmoil. Then the squire leaves his beech woods, and the laird his heather moors, and the Irish absentee his continental retreat; and all who would have a place in the world of Fashion gather from the four corners of the realm, to swell the restless multitudes of Vanity Fair. And Belgravia has its bloom likewise, during summer time—a bloom of fair English maidens, exhibited chiefly at night in hothouse ball rooms; and an echoing of coroneted equipages hung with laced lacqueys in the rear; and the skies of London behold its great arteries below, flowing with human souls in the giddy stream of fashion.

The west end was reposing, after its fatigues of balls and routs during the preceding night. Sunshine had seen it retiring to rest, and the forenoon was its midnight. All the dawn had resounded with carriage wheels; only the milkman and housemaids were astir when the city was buckling on afresh its armour of toil. Silent sunny streets stretched through May Fair.

In one of these was a pretty morning room, laid out with the appurtenances of breakfast for three individuals. A cup and plate had been used, and yet contained a residuum of tea and toast; while the lady to whom they belonged sat meditatively in an arm-chair, looking out of window. A little woman she was, and had been handsome at some date unknown; still, her brow was fair, her eyes bright: she was well-preserved. But about the lips, now when she had no motive for any particular expression, there was a care-worn look: and those who had seen Mrs. Ferrol only in her full dress of smiles at Lady Sandowne's last night, would hardly have recognised the sprightly little woman in her sackcloth of thoughtfulness this morning.

Before her, on a salver, lay what she had erewhile longed for—precious little notes of invitation from names high in the *beau monde;* but among them, what embittered all the sweet, was a fair pink envelope, neither crested nor coroneted—the sheath whence had issued the sharp sting of a milliner's bill, with Madame Jupon's request for payment, couched in the politest terms. The items were faultless, the lace accurately computed, no exaggeration in the matter of trimming; but who could ever have thought that two young ladies' bonnets and ball dresses for one month could have amounted to such a frightful sum?

It must be owned that Mrs. Ferrol seems rather a novice in these matters, or she would not be discomposed by half-a-dozen milliners' bills, however heavy. The lady might have remembered a case of this defensive hardening in the late Colonel Ferrol, of H.M.'s 25th

Dragoons, whose serenity was rarely disturbed by the tribe of duns that waited upon his movements, and who, as a matter of principle involving personal comfort, put every suspicious-looking envelope into the fire unopened. What though, at his demise, his widow and orphans were left with nought but the crown pension and Mrs. Ferrol's diminutive fortune, which last was represented by a charge on an Irish estate?—had not the gallant officer enjoyed life in the highest circles, and were such paltry considerations as the prospective welfare of wife and children to hamper his amusements? Perish the thought!

His relict retired to cheap lodgings at Boulogne, there to educate her children as best she might; and who shall tell the hard work and miserable shifts she was obliged to have recourse to, in order to eke out accomplishments for her daughters, and classics for her sons? Doubtless she must have been consoled amidst her labours and privations by the remembrance of the splendid appearance always kept up by her deceased colonel; doubtless she was stimulated by the hope that one day his sons might tread in his steps, and keep up an appearance also.

The times were bad with Irish estates, so that the charge on her brother's property paid chiefly an interest of expectations; for the Loftus lands were heavily and hereditarily dipt. But, by exertion of his parliamentary influence, Sir Hugh procured recognition of the late colonel's military service, in the form of a commission for young Horace Ferrol; and the era of this story being before that of competitive examinations, the delighted boy was speedily invested with that scarlet coat and gold lace, which embodies the fighting fever of youthful Britons. One of the many hundreds which Colonel Ferrol had drained through his betting-book, as a sporting character, would have gone a good way towards liquidating the tremendous bills ensuing from clothiers, hatters, bootmakers, etc., which spread consternation through the little *ménage* at

Boulogne, and were eventually transmitted to Sir Hugh; which expedient Mrs. Ferrol thought of adopting at present, with reference to Madame Jupon's communication.

To say that any member possesses a pocket borough, during these days of parliamentary purity guaranteed by the Reform Bill, may, for aught we know, be an affront to the majesty of the Commons; nevertheless, it is true that Sir Hugh Loftus had been returned for his neighbouring constituency of Ballyrotton for a score of years. And during a visit he paid to his sister at Boulogne, she so worked upon his feelings, and so represented the benefit that must accrue to his nieces from the arrangement, that he was persuaded into giving up his comfortable bachelor lodgings, and taking a furnished house in May Fair for the season.

It was the period of Mrs. Ferrol's triumph and trials. Triumph, in that she saw her beloved girls in "the position for which Nature had designed them," as she expressed it; and trials, because of the vulgar necessity of having a moneyed reality to back the glittering appearance. Hence a woful hiatus between income and expenditure, which Mrs. Ferrol was obliged at times to contemplate, as on this morning.

The tea had grown cold, and the toast flabby, while yet she ruminated. It was nearly noon by the gilt clock on the mantelpiece when she summoned the boy in buttons, whom she chose to call her page.

"Has Sir Hugh rang yet, Ernest?"

"No, Madam." We may observe that the lad's genuine patronymic was Dick Jones, and that he looked every letter of it.

"Bring fresh chocolate for Miss Ferrol; and tell Smith that I shall want the carriage at one."

Mildred seated herself at the breakfast table, looking very sleepy, and very handsome, despite her slipshod undress. "Mamma, where are you going at one?" she asked when the door closed.

"To Madame Jupon's, my dear;" and Mrs. Ferrol folded the bill into its pink envelope.

"Oh, mamma, let me see the new invitations;" and, regardless of her cooling chocolate, Mildred sprang up to read some half-dozen notes. "Mrs. Portland Plaice's *matinée musicale*—that will be delightful; we shall meet everybody there. Sir Randolph and Lady Balruddery. Do we accept that, mamma?"

"I shall consult your uncle," was the reply; the worldly minded Mrs. Ferrol the while thinking that Lady Balruddery—her country-woman, who had good-naturedly taken them up at their first entrance into London society, and pushed them as high as her ability allowed—was not so decidedly *haut ton* to justify an indiscriminate acceptance of her invitations.

"So Horace will get leave for a fortnight—how glad I shall be to see the dear fellow! I wonder his letters always smell so of cigars; surely he does not keep them in his writing-case; I think he invariably says he is 'hard up.'"

"He is obliged to make such an appearance, my dear, on his wretched means," her mother observed.

The girls ate their breakfast amidst an animated conversation concerning the preceding evening's events; which were, briefly, some considerable attention paid to Mildred by the youthful Lord Limpet, son to their entertainer, the Earl of Sandowne; Mildred's consequent coolness towards Mr. Wardour, whom previously she had favoured, and towards a distant cousin, Euston Ferrol, son and heir to the chief of the banking firm, Rupee, Ferrol, and Company. Nothing of this had escaped their mother's eyes: for, however engrossed among the chaperones, the calculating woman's every sense was watchful of the interests of her beloved daughters; watchful especially that they did not waste their valuable time upon younger sons, or penniless professional men. An impossible peer was nearly as bad as either; so she now administered a

judicious reproof to Mildred for her unguarded conduct with reference to Mr. Ferrol.

"But, mamma, I don't like him half so well as even Mr. Wardour. He has no agreeability—no *esprit.*"

"Child, don't talk nonsense. He has what you want—a position, and wealth." As if the matter were thus settled, Mrs. Ferrol swept from the room. Her brother was shaving when she tapped at his door, and, with an affectionate inquiry after his sleep, seated herself beside the dressing table. His grey eyes looked comical as he fresh-stropped his razor.

"Well, Maria, what's the matter now? Which of the boys wants cash this morning, eh?"

"You naughty man," Mrs. Ferrol said, shaking her hand at him with an engaging gesture; "there's no concealing anything from you."

"I guessed it was a question of supplies," said Sir Hugh, lathering the other side of his face carefully. "Let's hear what it's all about."

She related her financial troubles. "The dear girls could not have been more economical than they have been; but really, going into the society we do, it is absolutely essential that they keep up an appearance suitable to their position. I need not tell you how it pains me to have recourse to you, my dear generous brother——" Here Mrs. Ferrol's handkerchief was brought into action, and she became incoherent. "They would be an ornament to any rank, however exalted——"

("I hope the foolish woman's thinking that Mildred will be Lady Limpet," quoth the baronet to himself.)

"——Cold shade of poverty blighting their youth and beauty—emerging from it by their noble uncle's generous aid—any sacrifice for my beloved children—" all this was delivered in the strongest italics of emphasis. Sir Hugh gravely handed her some eau-de-cologne, wherewith to soothe her agitated brow.

"As to paying the bill now, that is out of the question," he observed; "but you can stave it off for awhile. I'll give you twenty pounds, and you must use such rhetoric as has just overcome me"—his mouth was comical again—"to persuade Madame What's-her-name to wait for the rest."

"But, Hugh!"

"But, Maria, I cannot help you further: here's a letter from Scroogem, informing me that three town lands on the Ballintemple estate won't pay a farthing of rent this year; I'll hardly be able to meet the interest of all the incumbrances, and get through current expenses, somehow. But of course the girls must not be shabby, if Castle Loftus itself were to be put in pawn."

On the strength of which declaration, Mrs. Ferrol further propitiated Madame Jupon by ordering new dresses for Mrs. Portland Plaice's *matinée musicale.* What was it to her, or to anybody but the obscure sufferers, that, a few other large bills proving also unproductive, Madame Jupon was compelled to lower the wages of her workwomen, which was equivalent to short food for many a mouth?

CHAPTER II.

FURTHER ON QUICKSANDS.

OTHER objects of Mrs. Ferrol's fond anxiety were her two sons. Hugh was at the university, Horace in the army, as already stated.

Though in the receipt of the handsome income of ninety-six pounds per annum, for carrying the colours of the 151st or Prince's Own regiment of foot, the last-named young gentleman found that was not in easy circumstances. The deductions for mess and he band funds absorbed about seven pounds eighteen shillings monthly; and the remaining two shillings could hardly be expected to satisfy

his washerwoman and tailor. For six weeks after joining, he struggled to be economical; but there was young Brown and the Honourable Angus MacWhinger, his fellow ensigns, drinking claret daily at his elbow, while he sipped only the Regent's allowance of sherry; and he was asked to supper parties which must be returned; and every fellow in the regiment had a horse but himself and Cerate, the assistant-surgeon; and he must smoke havannahs at five guineas a box, because the rest did so, and subscribe to balls and races in like manner; for the Prince's Own was a "crack" corps, and its officers boasted of being as "fast" as any in the service. And penniless Ensign Ferrol must keep up with Lieutenant Mohur, whose father's name had three stars against it in the list of Indian Stock; and with Lieutenant Cotton, son to a Manchester millionaire; and with Lieutenant Delmour, nephew and heir to a viscount. He imitated them, lest they should affix to his name the dread stigma of poverty. How many letters did the poor boy compose to his mother, and, all through the pleasant careless beginning, had a nightmare of the needful postscript heavy upon him, in which he begged of "dear mamma" to get uncle Hugh to look at the enclosed. And this was generally a slip of blue paper, with engraved tortuous title, illuminated by sketches of the latest coats and vests.

"What an alarming quantity of clothes you wear, my boy," said Sir Hugh, as they sat together after dinner, the day of Horace's arrival from his regiment; "and the prices are wonderful—fifty per cent. more than Shako charged in your outfit."

Horace reddened under his uncle's glance, for those Celtic eyes possessed keenness as well as drollery; and the young officer pulled his incipient silky whisker cruelly, as he replied:—

"The fact is, sir, that the fellow has accommodated me with ready money occasionally, and then I must take goods to make up tho amount——"

"Ah! that explains. I thought you had got the dearest tailor in all England. You don't find the red coat quite the Elysium you fancied, I dare say."

"It is a pleasant life enough, sir, if a fellow had not the perpetual bother of trying to make ends meet."

"I shouldn't say you took much trouble on that score," the baronet remarked drily.

"Why, you know, a fellow would be put in Coventry by the mess if he didn't do like everybody else: he must keep up an appearance, or he may as well quit the service. They would think it mean in me to shirk any expense shared by the rest; and I'd sooner strip off the scarlet jacket to-morrow, than have such a thing said."

"Ha! the old Loftus spirit breaking out: very fine, no doubt; but it has unfortunately beggared the race, and left the last of us struggling under the debts of generations; for if any one else in the county kept hounds, we must keep them too, and be the best mounted men at every meet, and entertain all the world at every assizes; till now, the lights are out in Castle Loftus, and wind and weather drive in through many a cranny. Never mind: the estates will last my time, though I am almost up to my chin; and after me—the deluge."

The old gentleman mused a little, perhaps, on the said deluge which was to overwhelm his sixth cousin Killinure Loftus, on whom the estates were entailed, and to whom he bore no particular love, as is generally the case with heirs apparent. After smoothing his napkin abstractedly for some minutes:—

"You're at the top of the list when MacWhinger steps up; and if you could get a staff appointment, or a place as recruiting officer, you might be able to get along to your company. But an ensign's pay is certainly very small."

"Small, sir! it is miserable. Five and three-pence per day, not

including stoppages, to keep a fellow like a gentleman—impossible I wonder you don't make a stir about it in parliament, sir:" and Horace waxed eloquent on the young officers' grievance-topic, which may be heard discussed in precisely the same terms among the juniors of every mess table to this day.

By-and-by Sir Hugh adjourned to the House, where, in obedience to the Ballyrotton poorlaw guardians, he was to ask a question respecting the deportation of paupers; and towards midnight Horace escorted his mother and sisters to Lady Glenmoriston's reception. Now Lord Limpet had, sultan-like, transferred his attentions to another; but Mildred still held Mr. Euston Ferrol captive, and three minutes after her appearance in the well-dressed circle, he was beside her. This gentleman deserves description; for is he not to be representative of the house of Rupee and Ferrol —popularly considered equivalent to the possession of a gold mine? And the majority of the mothers of his acquaintance are disinterestedly anxious to provide the promising young man with a good wife. What though his countenance is not very prepossessing and he has a keen hard eye, marvellous in one of his years, set deeply under a brow already ploughed with a frown-line; plenty of people think him handsome, and those who do not, declare him distinguished-looking. Mildred feels rather elated that he has selected her from the bevy of fair ones around. Sir Hugh, looking in after the rising of the House, discerns the aspect of affairs and is well pleased. Not so Mr. Richard Wardour, who lingers about the brilliant rooms, unable to withdraw from her presence, though feeling himself slighted and supplanted; his only consolation being a few words now and then to her quiet sister Agnes.

But another watcher was there; Mrs. Carnaby Pike, maternal relative to Mr. Euston Ferrol, and who had long yearned to provide for him with reference to one of her own seven daughters, which dear girls had played at him, sung at him, sketched at him,

unsuccessfully through their several teens. This lady felt it to be her painful duty to drive next day to the banking-house in the city, at an hour when she knew Euston would be at his club, and inform Mr. Ferrol, senior, of the designs upon his son entertained by the late colonel's daughter.

"He may be only amusing himself, as young men will," continued Mrs. Carnaby Pyke, settling her skirts, with vengeful memories of some attentions paid her youngest daughter by the same Euston. "But it is the news in twenty circles this morning, what a brilliant match the good-looking Miss Ferrol is about to make. For she is good-looking, there can be no doubt, though I think her manners decidedly *prononcées*, and wanting in the timid retiringness which should ever distinguish a young lady's demeanour." The reader will guess that all seven Misses Carnaby Pyke were noted for insipidity.

The sardonic old banker, who hated what he called meddlesome women, could not refrain from amusing himself at the expense of his informant. "I hope my son may ever be so fortunate as to get a wife so beautiful as Mildred," he said. "But, as you justly observe, my dear madam, we want something more substantial than mere looks. There was a time when I fancied that your Agatha would have satisfied my every wish on the subject."

Mrs. Carnaby Pyke became agitated. "The fondest desires of my heart would have been fulfilled!" she exclaimed, very truly. "Don't let us speak of it—the dear girl!" How ineffably dearer she would have been had she become the wealthy Mrs. Euston Ferrol, her mother felt with a pang.

"Agatha being then out of the question," the old gentleman continued slowly, while he leaned back in his chair, "I looked about for the essentials of Euston's wife; and first of these I see—*money*. We men of wealth require money to meet money. We cannot afford—positively cannot afford—to marry without money."

After his fair visitor had left, the banker's face was not pleasant to look at: all the lines seemed to have undergone a sudden deepening.

Next morning, at breakfast, he laid down his newspaper, pushed up his gold spectacles, and astonished his son, who was quietly opening an egg, with the query, "Whom do you intend to marry, Euston?"

The young man's pallid face almost flushed; for, though *àpropos* of nothing, the question had direct reference to his own thoughts. "I—I have not made up my mind upon the subject, sir."

"I only ask, because your cousin Mildred is so very pretty, that you might be tempted into a foolish thing; and mark me, Euston, you cannot afford to marry without a large fortune."

"I should have thought, sir, that your money would be sufficient to enable me to act independently in the matter," said his son.

"My money!" A slight change passed upon the old man's features; "it is not so much as people think; you won't be a millionaire, Euston. Again I tell you, that the first requisite in any woman whom you would make your wife is a large fortune."

"I am afraid I shall disregard it, sir."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Ferrol faced half round in his chair, and the eyes under his white brows gleamed uncomfortably. "You have not been mad enough——"

Euston was rather cowardly; he turned off his answer into some muttered observation about mercenary feeling.

"I will soon convince you of its necessity," said his father, standing up and unlocking a secretary near by. Euston wondered at his fearful pallor. "What do you imagine is the position of the firm at this moment? Hopeless insolvency!"

The last words hissed low between his teeth; Euston reeled back as if stricken. "You must know it soon—you may as well know it now;" and he produced papers from a secret drawer,

which his son's practised eye verified in a few moments. They were the private accounts of the partnership, drawn up in Mr. Ferrol's own handwriting, and revealing a large deficit. "Now do you see that you must not be caught by a pretty face, or by family, or by wit, or by anything but solid gold?"

Both sat down again; they looked at each other furtively. The elder Mr. Ferrol took up his paper, but the type-lines ran into an indistinct mass of wavering dots before his eyes. Euston mechanically put bread into his mouth, but it had no more taste than it had been shavings. In a changed voice he asked, "How long has this been the case?"

"It began last year," said his father, not looking at him, but at the columns of hazy print; "since those speculations in Paraguay securities failed. We had been unfortunate for some time; and the collapse of the Berar Bank was a terrible blow. I foresaw what has happened then."

The old man turned his 'Times' to a fresh page.

"It is well concealed; our partners are no fools; and the firm may stand for many a year, with discretion."

Euston breathed hard for a minute. The vista of a life of deception, deepening into crime, opened before him.

CHAPTER III.

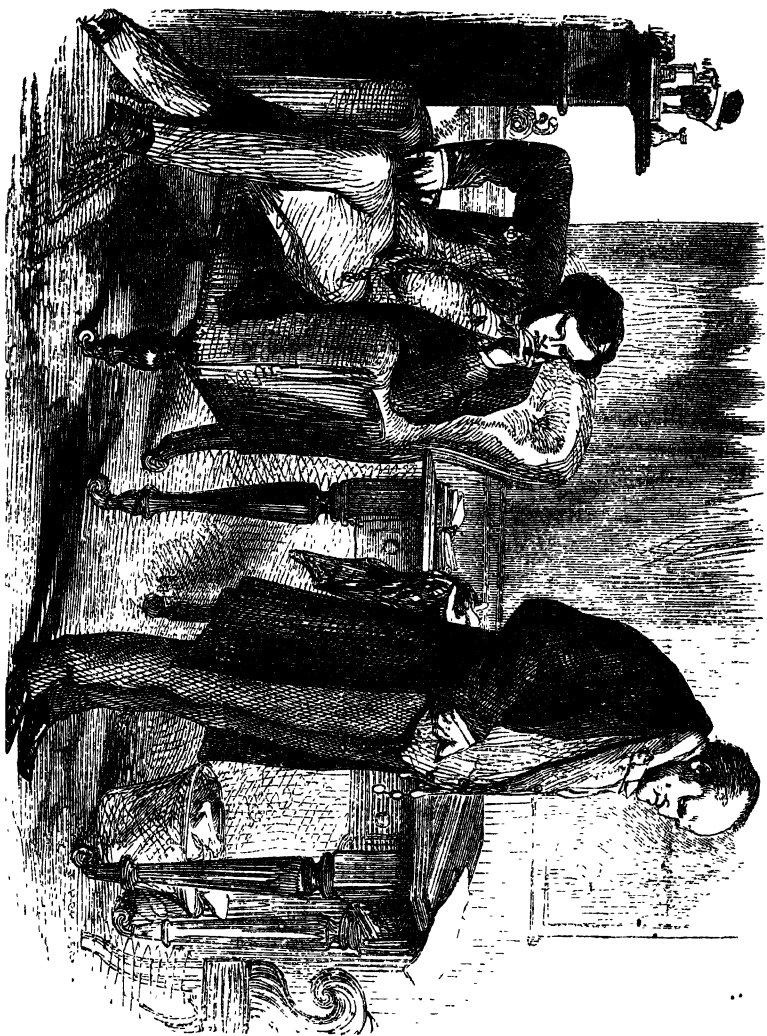
EUSTON'S CONFLICT AND CHOICE.

It may be believed that Mr. Euston Ferrol's breakfast was spoiled for that day. He took his hat, and, feeling that he needed air, motion—something to clear away the stifling sensation which was thick about him, he walked rapidly towards the Park. The words kept sounding in his ears, as if iterated perpetually by some dull distant echo in his brain, "Hopeless insolvency." He wanted to

be alone with the spectre, to look at it fairly, to measure its magnitude, to count the cost of its continual presence. He sat down in a retired place, and gave the rein to his thoughts.

As a gleam of sunshine on a dark day, came promptings of the honest and honourable course to pursue—to advise his father that the position of the firm should be declared, everything given up to their creditors, and the unutterable falseness of their present pretensions extinguished resolutely. Well had it been for Euston Ferrol had he obeyed these suggestions of that gracious Power which endeavours to withhold men from purposed evil, and to arrest their natural declension into sin. But the adversary was at work likewise with this leagured soul. "Then," whispered the Tempter, "you are willing to fall from your high estate, to endure the contumely of pity, to give up all your luxuries, and work hard in obscurity for your daily bread?" And the young man, reared in affluence and self-indulgence, with no higher principle of action than his own gratification, shrank from the courage of honesty. A thought as powerful as any other was of his cousin Mildred. He knew that he must give her up, if he were anything but the wealthy partner of the great banking firm; and she was now his affianced wife. If he were her husband, he would be stronger to face an altered fortune; he would postpone further consideration of the subject till then: a few weeks could not make much difference. Had he loved her truly, he could have harboured no such traitorous design of dragging her down into his possible misfortunes. But he was not without a gloss for his conscience. The ugly word "fraud" was wrapt in the euphemism of "keeping up appearances;" and a vision of possible successful speculation, which might replace the house in a solvent situation, bridged the black gulf of present bankruptcy.

Most people have seen Retzsch's celebrated etching of the chess-players—Satan and man the opponents, and the stake, a

"TELL HER THAT OUR FIRM IS INSOLVENT, AND WILL BE IN THE GAZETTE BEFORE A WEEK."

soul! A terrible truth lies shrouded in the parable. Such episodes of spirit conflict do take place in the history of many a life, with results involved which are vast as they are unforeseen. Euston Ferrol felt a comparative calm when the strife was over. Better had the fiercest tumult rent his breast, so it had ended otherwise. The temptation had triumphed; he laid the salvo to his conscience that it was but for a time.

Afternoon arrived before he found opportunity of private speech with his father. And then, in a few words, he informed him of his engagement with Mildred, and likewise of the usual determination in such cases, that nothing in the world should induce him to swerve from it. The old gentleman remained silent for some minutes. He sat in the same chair which had received Mrs. Carnaby Pyke's prophetic warning only the day before.

"And pray is the young lady aware that she marries an insolvent pauper?"

Euston was somewhat taken aback, but replied: "Certainly not; for at the time——"

"Of course," interrupted his father, "had you known your position, you would have informed her of it, and she would have accepted you—eh?"

The young man changed colour. "I suppose so, sir."

"'You suppose so!' No, Mr. Euston Ferrol; you are not so infatuated but that you know it is your gilding she values, and not yourself. However, you can easily put it to the test," he continued in an ironical tone. "Just tell her that our firm is insolvent, and will be in the 'Gazette' before a week. Tell her that probably you may be able, after the crash, to get a place as clerk in Duckett's, or some other banking-house—for you are clever, and understand the business well; and then you can make experiment of love in a cottage, which would undoubtedly suit your tastes and habits admirably. No more now," when his son

was about to speak; "do as I bid you—for know," and he stood up to leave the office, "that I would as soon go among all the clerks outside, and proclaim our insolvency, as see you make this pauper match."

"One word, sir," craved Euston, whose sharp wits suggested a telling truth. "If I marry anyone else, any lady of fortune, I shall have to make settlements; my circumstances will be minutely investigated by law agents; and that seems to me but another mode of getting into the 'Gazette.'"

His father stared at him an instant, from under his shaggy brows. "Your sophistry shall not avail," he said. Sir Hugh Loftus is the natural guardian of the young lady; and if he makes reference to me, I shall feel it my duty to enlighten him as to your future prospects."

Mr. Ferrol's brougham was announced; through the swinging mahogany doors and bowing subordinates he passed, and was whirled away to his club. During the drive he sat crushed in a corner, as if the frame of the old man had suddenly shrunken and collapsed; his face dreary as that of any penniless wretch in dense London.

"Would he dare to do it?" thought his son, in mental reference to his last threat. Such opposition as this he had not looked for. The matter seemed to stand on the issue of who cared most for all that would be lost by an *éclaircissement.* The odds were against the younger man. But his was that dogged nature which clings the more tenaciously to its object because of difficulty and opposition. His astuteness calculated on the elements of his father's character, his love of display, of luxury, and of power: he could not lightly sacrifice the wealth which gave him these; and hence Euston concluded that his words were an empty menace.

The necessity of persuading Mrs. Ferrol to a temporary concealment of her daughter's engagement, tasked all his ability.

That lady wept over the prospect of parting with her beloved Mildred, though she owned there was no one she had ever known who so nearly came up to a fond mother's ideal of him to whom she could intrust her treasure. Little he knew that she had been just before within an ace of boxing the treasure's ears, being provoked by her refusal to appear to her lover. For Mildred did not in the least care about the man she had promised to marry; which her politic mother averred was of no consequence, provided she were civil to him for the present. Domestic bliss subsequently would take care of itself.

Euston spent the evening with them quite *au sein du famille*. Agnes played the accompaniments to her sister's songs, and the pianoforte part in her brilliant harp duets; and Mrs. Ferrol showed off her treasure in every point of view; and there was a charming little supper, by-and-by, with some unexceptionable dry sillery of a noted vintage—an appeal to a section of the guest's nature, which his keen-sighted hostess had fathomed. More fascinated than ever, he made his adieus; and Mrs. Ferrol quenched the wax lights, and, having clad herself in a marvellous old dressing-gown, sat up some hours to finish the turning of a silk dress. After which, the indefatigable woman was next morning working strenuously at some other piece of dressmaking or millinery; and, altogether, undergoing an amount of daily labour, in "keeping up appearances," equivalent to the toils of any ordinary charwoman or maid-of-all-work.

But had she not her reward? Did she not gain admittance into circles above her, and make acquaintances in the first society? Had she not nobility on her visiting list, and their cards upon her table, ranged carefully, the highest rank uppermost? And, crowning triumph! was not her daughter engaged to marry one of the best matches accessible? What matter that her wealthy associates pitied her, with perhaps a sneer at her cleverness; and

those chilling dames of rank condescended only to a cold bow, or at most an extension of finger-tips, to the aspiring little woman? They knew that she would drop from their firmament at the end of the season, as completely as any falling star shooting into its native fog again.

Euston had gone home, and been surprised to find the house yet lighted, the servants in commotion.

"Mr. Ferrol is ill, sir: Dr. Proby is with him. I believe it is a threatening of paralysis, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOW, AND ITS RESULTS.

THE old man was not merely threatened, but actually stricken. In the dark hours, towards the dawning, that blow descended, for fear of which he had shivered in stupor all night long; heavily upon sense and motion it fell, and the hand which could yesterday have signed away thousands, lay helpless and aimless as an infant's.

His son looked at him in the grey daylight, when the candles were quenched, after the night of weary watching. The physicians had gone into another room, to hold consultation concerning the crisis; and Euston stood alone by his father's bedside. The face was drawn and withered, as by the lapse of a score years, since last evening; the eyes hollow, the lips shrunken. The apprehensive moaning, which had been frequent for hours, was now silent; he might have been dead, but for the bare breathing.

Euston shuddered. Like all others who have their portion in this world, the hideous necessity of leaving it was invariably put far from his thoughts; but here the idea was forced upon him—

thrust under his very eyes. He had a sensation, as if standing upon the edge of some utter darkness, and looking into its rayless depths, blindly. Beyond the narrow ledge of life, on which that nerveless form lay, he saw neither help nor hope. A horror fell upon him: he was glad to hear the physicians returning; he wiped the clammy drops from his pale forehead, and went to meet them.

Not that he had remembered the real cause for horror, ay, for tears of blood, could he have wept them. This rich man, his father, had no inheritance, save in earthly wealth: nothing, in all the boundless realm of eternity, did he love or value. The veriest pauper he would enter upon that untried existence, and burdened with that debt which even an endless life of pain cannot pay. Oh, were it not preferable to be of the lowest estate in this world, even a Lazarus among men, so the Saviour-friend were near in the hour of death and the day of judgment, rather than this Dives, who in his lifetime received his good things?

The result of the medical consultation was not so unfavourable as had been feared. One or two ameliorating symptoms were discovered in the patient, and a new system of curative agencies decided on, which it was hoped might prove efficient. Euston felt himself justified in going into the city, as usual; but, of course, he must first call at Bruton Street, lest Mildred might by any means hear a garbled account of his father's illness.

Now, Mrs. Ferrol chanced to be attired in the dressing-gown aforesaid, which had been an ancient flowered brocade of her husband's; the brilliant hues had worn in patches, and it was girded in the midst by the semblance of an invalided bell-rope. Her hair was rolled into a sort of topknot, on the very summit of her head, in a manner more convenient than picturesque. To assert that Mrs. Ferrol's demeanour was not affected by her attire, would be incorrect, and also more than could be safely predicated of any daughter of Eve; but her presence of mind did not desert

her under these trying circumstances. She welcomed him with all cordiality, begged him—blushing prettily—to excuse her deshabille, apologized for the late rising of the girls, being all the time in dread lest Mildred should suddenly make her appearance in curl papers. She would have wept, on hearing of Mr. Ferrol's illness, had she not recollected that her pocket handkerchief was unhappily up-stairs. But her sympathies were unbounded; and she could guarantee her darling child's misery when she should hear the sad intelligence.

"I shall break it to her gently," said the tender mother. "For I may tell you, Mr. Euston, she would be angry if she knew that I said such a thing; but still, I think I may venture, to *you*—that everything connected with a gentleman, who shall be nameless" —Mrs. Ferrol looked arch—"has the deepest interest for her. Feeling, Mr. Euston, feeling is the predominant quality in my beloved child's disposition. In fact, I may say that Mildred positively gushes over with feeling." The lady missed her handkerchief, especially at this juncture.

"I hope to bring you better accounts in the evening," he said, after a moment's pre-occupied silence. Mrs. Ferrol's usual graceful adieu was impeded by her narrow robe, and a consciousness of the topknot cresting her appearance. For fully ten minutes afterwards, Mrs. Ferrol sate without moving, in deep cogitation on this important news, and its possible results; and by-and-by she administered a severe scolding to Ernest, the page, for having admitted any gentleman at such an unseasonable hour; which admonition he received with a snivelling countenance, and professed contrition.

So haggard was Euston after his sleepless night, that the clerks remarked to one another on his altered looks; the elder praising him as an attentive son, and exemplary man of business. He was very busy that day. Besides the usual work, he commenced a

rigid examination of the bank books, with a view to becoming acquainted with the minutiæ of its affairs; he investigated the particulars of the hidden insolvency, and found that the partners were in the habit, now, of borrowing from the firm for their personal supplies. Rarely was there a record of such loans being refunded. He discovered that one or two other firms were aware of the rotten condition of the bank's affairs, but were bound to silence by their own possession of some of the insufficient securities —on which they even traded successfully.

Worn and ill as he had looked on entering the office, his appearance was not improved when he left it in the afternoon. The head clerk, an old man, who more than suspected the real state of things, raised his eyes as the young partner passed; and Euston was not so skilled in the arts of concealment, but that a glance of almost guilty apprehensiveness escaped him. Thenceforth he dreaded and disliked old Grimstone. Like one who treads the hollow crust of a crater, conscious that utter destruction is within a few inches of his feet; or the men who march over a powder mine, not knowing the instant when it will explode and blow them to atoms; he had a continual slumbering fear, dark in the background of his thoughts.

Very dark it seemed, indeed, as he sat by himself that evening, Dr. Proby, who dined with him, asleep on the sofa; for he never took more than two glasses of madeira, knowing that many of his patients were qualified to be such by the juice of the grape. Euston had the decanters as his companions; his face was flushed when he left them. For the first time he had tried the perilous prescription of drowning care in wine.

Humming a tune, he strolled to the open windows for coolness. Evening sunshine was adown the still street; all the gaunt grand mansions of that aristocratic region looked happier for it: but not so happy as the unpretending country houses, or even the white

cottages upon hill-sides, where also strayed those golden beams. Somewhat of the soothing influence of the hour stole into his jaded heart. Presently from the tangled mass of sound in the distance, one noise became dissevered and distinct—carriage wheels drawing near, turning into the street: they rolled up to the door. A lady got out hastily, followed by her maid with a dressing-case, and the driver with a portmanteau; Euston ended his tune with a soft prolonged whistle as he went out into the hall.

"My nephew!" and the lady presented a veiled cheek to his salute. "How is your father?—I have been wretchedly anxious since I received your note. He is better? that is well—I am charmed to hear it. I have come to stay with you for a few days, if you will receive me. You will be very happy? I am sure of it;" and she graciously extended her hand to be led to the dining room. "I could not remain absent from my dear brother. If there is any sitting up, or other hardship to be borne, I trust I shall be permitted to share in it, regardless of personal consequences. One should never think of one's self at such a time. It was paralysis, I think you said? Extraordinary: he is quite a youngish man—only nineteen years older than I am. Pray don't take any trouble about me, Euston; whatever the housekeeper has cold, will do for dinner: I came straight from the luncheon table at Brighton. I was just having some trifle, when the postman called: it gave me such a shock!"

Miss Dora Ferrol, as may be seen from this specimen, talked very rapidly, and chiefly about herself. She was accustomed to make accidental allusion to the remarkable fact that her brother the banker was exactly nineteen years older than herself; ill-natured people considered that the said number was not well authenticated. But she was careful to sustain the allegation, by a juvenile system of dressing, and unwearied care of her wig, teeth, complexion, and other false appurtenances, which were, neverthe-

less, perfectly palpable to her numerous acquaintances—Miss Ferrol resembling the ostrich, that hides its head in the sand, and believes itself altogether concealed, while every feather is visible to the whole world.

On her earnest request, she was allowed to sit up in the sick-room that night; but the nurse at one time intrusting her to give the patient a drink, she spilled the major part over his helpless unshorn chin, upon his shirt and bed-clothes: after which, Mrs. Nupkins asserted "she warn't good for nuffin," and eschewed her aid totally. And she herself got dismally nervous in the middle of the night, when Nupkins had fallen fast asleep, and the mice were singing drowsily behind the wainscot, and the streets were still as the grave, and the bed made a great mountain of darkness, with an unknown land of black shadow beyond; and the sick man breathed heavily, perpetually moving his left hand to and fro on the coverlet, which she had heard was a symptom of—of—what she shuddered to imagine; and she caught a glimpse of her own face in a long glass opposite, contradicting, by its false blooming cheek, the deadly pallor of her lips and purplish circles at her eyes:—the effect was altogether so disastrous on her spirits and appearance, especially the latter, that she decided she was unequal to any further midnight watchings. Her energies were for the future restricted to sitting beside her brother in the daytime, after she had tastefully attired herself. The semi-gloom of curtains was most favourable to anything of a dubious complexion.

The old man became materially better. Power of speech returned gradually: but there was a flickering light in his eyes, a wandering look sometimes, as if the body were mending faster than the mind.

"We were prepared for it," said Dr. Proby: "the stroke has slightly—only slightly—affected his brain; we cannot promise that he shall ever be quite as he was previous to the attack.'

These words passed at the fireplace. Euston walked to the bedside where his father was propped up—feeling a strange impulse of loneliness and tenderness: he took the aged veined hand in his. Mr. Ferrol raised his eyes suddenly with a flash of recognition and remembrance.

"The secret—Euston," he said thickly—"the secret—don't keep it any longer—I thought when I was ill, you ought to tell it——"

"What secret, sir?" demanded his son, sternly.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the old man, timorously—"I believe you do not know it—I forget——" and the sentence dwindled into mumblings.

"We are to expect that he will talk such nonsense as this—eh?" Euston said to the doctor, who answered in the affirmative.

CHAPTER V.

SUBTERFUGE AND SHAM.

The old banker being tacitly laid by, on the shelf as it were; extinguished from active life, completely as any corpse in a graveyard; and, after his sixty years of toiling and scheming for wealth, having his possessions limited to a lonely pair of rooms, where he existed in custody of a servant, and longed all day for the childish excitement of his meals—Euston was master. A joyous sensation, commonly, when the young man feels himself emancipated into full power of self-action and dominion of others; but Euston Ferrol had little of such complacency. His youth had departed at one stride, during that memorable morning in the Park. Care had fixed her vulture talons in his heart, never to relax them more. Everybody said that this saddened air and pre-occupied manner

were graceful under the circumstances; bespeaking a proper sense of inexperience, and of the responsibility suddenly devolved upon him.

His betrothed saw little of it. In her presence he was devoted to her every wish and even caprice; he brought her rich gifts, he wearied her with assiduous attentions. For, as she regarded him neither with affection nor esteem, she was capable of being fatigued by her lover—a not very favourable earnest of the felicity of their married life.

Now was Mrs. Ferrol daily busy in an occupation of all others the most agreeable to her—the preparation of a *trousseau.* Madame Jupon had *carte blanche* for the supply of the most fashionable novelties; Sir Hugh having as usual declared that, were Castle Loftus the forfeit, his niece should make an appearance suitable to her position. To do the bridegroom justice, he cared not though she came to his house with but one gown; he was unaware of the ruinous expenditure involved in her equipment. Agnes once or twice ventured a remark on the enormous bills that would be sure to ensue, but was met by her mother's answer, that when a girl without fortune made a match so brilliant as this, the least that might be done by her relatives was to give her a handsome outfit."

"But, mamma, how *do* you imagine the expenses are to be met?"

"I have lived longer than you, Agnes; and I hope I know the ways of the world by this time," was the retort; "and things have come to a pretty pass, if I am to be reproached by my own child with extravagance!"

"Dear mamma——"

"I always thought, Agnes, that your greatest fault was a certain want of spirit, which might actually lead to meanness, if not guarded against. I cannot imagine where you learned such narrow ideas. Certainly not from your poor father, who was always

extremely jealous of his dignity and position in life, and grudged no sacrifice to keep it up. How can you contemplate your sister's entering the family of a rich husband as a mere beggar? I am sure I would rather be embarrassed for years than submit to such humiliation."

Her daughter did not say what she thought—that the real humiliation was to put one's self in the power of others by incurring debt; and the real meanness, to keep up a perpetual falsehood of mere appearance.

"I think I shall recommend you to Richard Wardour, as a substitute for my worthless self," said Mildred; "I am sure he has those antiquated notions of living within one's means, and doing without things sooner than try one's credit. You would suit perfectly," she added, gazing at the conscious colour suffusing Agnes's cheek and brow; "and then you could lead the lowly country life for which you are always pining. Curious it is—I never have blushed for Euston Ferrol as you blush now! I wonder why?"

"Nonsense, Mildred! I don't like such conversation. How pretty that pink wreath will look!"

Mildred, in a sort of brown study, was trying on some coiffures newly arrived from the milliner's; she spoke not till she answered her own question.

"I am afraid it is because I don't care about him. People say there is a drop of vinegar in every cup; certainly the bitterness of mine will be the impossibility of caring about the person with whom I am to spend my life."

"If you are in earnest, Mildred, you surely should not do him the injustice of marrying him," said Agnes, as she had said on another occasion when the bride-elect talked thus.

"Oh, it is a fair bargain enough," Mildred replied, with a laugh which was not pleasant to hear. "He admires me for my beauty,

and I admire him for his wealth; so we shall agree very well, I have no doubt, and be as happy as we deserve;" and she turned her handsome face, arrayed in another head-dress, towards the mirror. "As to money matters, which trouble your innocent heart so much, I have sufficient confidence in mamma to feel sure that she will do herself no material injury. Debt ought hardly to be a bugbear of ours, after the life we have led."

"But I cannot bear," faltered Agnes, the tears in her eyes, as she arranged the flowers upon her sister's glossy hair, "the disrespect, the disgrace. I assure you even the servants murmur greatly, and I know that the grocer sent an insolent message to mamma. I expect daily to hear that Fetlock refuses to supply horses for the carriage any longer. What can we expect? The poor people must live, and we are actually taking the bread out of their mouths."

"How metaphorically you speak!" said Mildred, drawing a flower straight which had swerved from its place. "Of course we could not do anything so savage. Sir Hugh will set all to rights."

"I don't think Sir Hugh has much money, though he is so good-natured as to give us everything we want. Now, just as an instance of the injustice we are committing, the washerwoman met me one evening on the staircase, and implored me to get her some money from mamma. She had been washing for us the entire season, and never was paid a farthing after the first few weeks; and she has a large family of children dependent on her. I pitied the poor creature deeply, and she nearly cried as she told me how badly off they were, owing to the negligence and inconsiderateness of her rich employers. It seems to me very nearly akin to dishonesty!" exclaimed Agnes, warmly. "I wish, with all my heart, we were safe at Castle Loftus; for here I feel as if I lived on a volcano."

"Unpleasant, rather," observed Mildred, absently. "Do you know, I think I shall wear my rose and silver at Lady Elizabeth's to-morrow night; I am tired of blue. I can get Madame Jupon to renew the trimming—an economical measure which ought to please you, little niggard;" and she tapped Agnes's cheek playfully.

The alteration was made, at an expense for lace, &c. of some guineas' addition to Mrs. Ferrol's account. The knowledge of the wealthy alliance about to be formed in the family kept Madame Jupon compliant, as also other creditors: for a time Mrs. Ferrol had no difficulty in procuring whatever she chose to order. And really her manners were so very good, her smile so very fascinating, that it stood her in money's stead many a time, and softened many a creditor into longer patience. These agreeabilities could not, however, always fulfil the place of hard cash.

One afternoon Mr. Euston Ferrol, being ushered into the drawing-room at Bruton Street, as usual, was surprised to behold a figure thrown against the arm of a distant sofa, evidently in deep trouble. A gloom of drawn blinds rendered it impossible that he should recognise the individual until he had approached her; and then, starting up, ashamed of being caught in such emotion, Mrs. Ferrol would have left the room with an apology. He besought her to explain. She wept the more, but suffered herself to be detained. Indeed, the tears were genuine, the distress unfeigned. His heart stood still. Was it anything concerning Mildred?

No; and yet it must concern her indirectly, of course. Mrs. Ferrol's tears flowed faster, and expression failed her. The lover protested that anything in the slightest degree affecting Mildred was of the utmost consequence to him. Would Mrs. Ferrol not confide in him?

Being what she wanted to do above all other things, a little

persuasion sufficed. Sitting upright, and composing her face, she looked straight at him with her luminous eyes, and began :—

"You were aware, Euston—and to your generous heart the fact, which would have been everything to a sordid nature, made no difference—that Mildred would be a portionless bride. You shrank not from my child because her loveliness wanted the gold and diamond setting which the covetousness of our present age deems essential to the adornment of beauty. Your character was too noble, too disinterested, to be influenced by circumstances like these." Mrs. Ferrol raised her pretty hand oratorically.

He began to feel himself quite a generous fellow, instead of what he actually was—one of the narrowest souls in Europe.

"But perhaps, my dear Euston—you must allow me to call you thus, for I will not disguise the fact that it expresses my real sentiments of affection; yet would a physiognomist have been puzzled to read aught but keen calculation in those luminous eyes bent upon his downcast face; "you may not be prepared to learn that Mildred's mother is embarrassed—actually distressed—by the mere effort to bestow upon her precious and beautiful child a *trousseau* such as should accompany a daughter of the Ferrols to her husband's home; and *such* a husband!" the lady exclaimed parenthetically. "You asked me the cause of my tears, and frankly I have revealed it; for are you not soon to become my son? Forgive me"—(sob)—"that I should thus"—(sob, sob)—"darken your bright horizon"—(three sobs)—"with the shadow of my cares." Here the voice became inaudible, and she rose.

"My dear madam," Euston said, that feminine artillery of sobs having quite taken his pocket by storm, "I shall only be too happy to be permitted to supply your temporary requirements. I will write a check this moment if you give me a pen."

"*You!* Euston," with a start of astonishment—"receive pecuniary assistance from *you!* Impossible! What would my beloved

Mildred say, did she know that I had confided to you the secret of our straitened circumstances? The pride of the Ferrols survives in her; and her sensitive spirit would receive such a wound, that I cannot calculate the consequences."

"But she need never hear of the transaction," he returned, rather coldly: for Nature had endowed him with penetration, and the clever mother was somewhat over-acting her part. "As you please; I shall be glad to do anything, or furnish any sum that can conduce to Mildred's comfort or happiness." Which was very true.

"The only condition," said Mrs. Ferrol, after a pause, during which she had narrowly scanned his half-averted face—"the only condition on which I could possibly accept your most generous and princely offer, would be, that you regard the money as a loan, to be sacredly repaid."

"If it lessen your feeling of obligation, let it be so," was the reply. He walked to the writing-table, "Will two hundred pounds be sufficient? or shall I make it three?"

"Oh, Euston, you are nobly generous," exclaimed the lady, enthusiastically; "may the blessing of the widow be upon you." He took the tacit hint, and filled the cheque for the larger sum. She received it with tears of admiration; thanking him again and again for this opportune loan—"a loan it must be, remember; I would tear across the cheque this moment, if I thought you contemplated anything else."

"There is no necessity for such an extreme measure, madam," he said, with an almost imperceptible sneer.

"To very few," she observed, drawing her shawl about her gracefully—"to very few indeed could I bear to be indebted for a favour like this; but there is something about you, Euston, if you will allow me to say it, which invites to confidence."

"A great stroke of business that," quoth Euston to himself

when she had left the room; and with a cynical smile he rubbed his hard fingers over his harder chin. He rather admired his mother-in-law's cleverness; but then, it would not do to have her living too near them after marriage. Perhaps she might be induced to reside in Ireland.

His respect for her abilities would have been increased, could he have known the wonders she accomplished with that three hundred pounds. Too prudent to liquidate any one bill fully, she paid instalments of the most pressing, so gracefully, that her creditors might probably have been less gratified by receipt of their whole accounts from a person of blunt honesty and bad manners: as for the smaller fry—the washerwoman, milkman, and others sufficiently humble and poor to be safely passed over—Mrs. Ferrol was much too wise to let such helpless and harmless creditors get any share of the three hundred.

CHAPTER VI.

MILDRED'S MARRIAGE.

DIRE was the dismay of the dwellers in Castle Loftus, when it became known that the "masther" intended to hold a wedding in the mansion of his forefathers, which was a very aged building; tracing origin back to some of the aboriginal kings of Connaught, and dowered with every mark of genuine decrepitude, both of mason work and of means. The pleasure grounds were a wilderness of briars and sword-grass; cabbages and potatoes filled the whilom flower-beds. The park had been shorn of its best timber, and moss greened every path. The interior of the house was in perfect keeping with this exterior desolation.

"Sure there isn't a bed-room, hardly, but the rain dhrips into," was the comment of the old housekeeper; "an' along the upper corridor, of a wet night, we do have to set a rigimint of pails an' bowls to catch the wather down through them rotten laths in the roof. An' what sort of a place is that to bring quality into, that wud as soon damp their foot as they'd put it in the fire?. Oh then, musha, wasn't big London big enough for the young lady to be married in, an' she must come all the way to Castle Loftus!"

"Whisht, woman," chided her son the caretaker, who also performed the office of butler—house-steward he called it—when Sir Hugh was at home; "it's delighted we ought to be to see the ould place looking any way lively again, afther its bein' desolate as a churchyard these years. I'll go meself for morther an' slates in the mornin', an' if I don't mend the roof beautiful, call me a Throjan."

"Mend the roof, is it? Arrah, what does the boy mane?" said the old woman, taking her pipe from her lips. Now this "boy" had grizzled hair, and was aged at least fifty. "Ye'll break yer neck, an' what matther if it did any good? but it won't."

"I'll try, anyhow; an' moreover, I'll set Micky to scrapin' them walks, which are as green as a leek for the want of somebody to tread on em; an' you'd betther yerself overlook the rooms, an' settle things as dacent as you can before himself comes. On my way to Ballinaslane in the morning I'll tell Biddy Keenahan to step across an' help you; she has a fine stout pair of arms for sweepin' or scrubbin' flures. An' I'll buy some paint—I think a good clear yellow would be purty for the hall-door." Andy fell into a rumination on this point, and others akin; till he suddenly exclaimed in a hopeless tone—"Oh, mother, I don't know how we'll ever do it at all at all!"

"What?"

"How we'll ever be able to have the house nice an' handsome

before sthrangers. I tell you 'twould go to my heart to have people say that Castle Loftus was not what it used to be in the ould times; when it's great hall was every night filled with guests, and the kitchen fire was kept burning day an' dark alike. Sure it's many a year since there was heat in that cowld hearth; an' where's the troops of servants?"

His mother responded with a groan, as she smoked busily.

"Only you an' me living in this big castle like two withered peas in a great pod," he continued; "an' the grand dhrawing-room—whatever possessed me to let the cow into it? I don't know what came over me, barrin' that the crathur hadn't hardly any roof over her in the barn, an' the pigs an' she didn't agree in the kitchen."

"Sure, when the grand dhrawin'-room never was finished, you couldn't do any harm," said his mother; "Masther Hugh used to keep hounds in it himself. I suppose we'd better have the hay cleared out of the library, at all events. What a pity the ould Sir Hugh didn't finish off any of them buildins, that cost no end of money! See what a fine house there wud be for this weddin'! instead of having our hearts sore an' blisthered wid the disrespectable look of the place: an' I wouldn't care if it wasn't before them Englishers, too."

Andy enlivened the turf fire with one or two vigorous pokes of his great shoe, and fell to cogitating, honest fellow, on what could be done to keep up appearances. He stared at the scarlet coals, while before his inventive vision passed all the wants of Castle Loftus—the dilapidated suites of rooms, many of them not weather-proof; the mouldy furniture, moth-eaten hangings, faded carpets. Andy had seen London in his youth; he remembered the interior of west end mansions, and the contrast well-nigh overwhelmed him. How could he ever sustain the dignity of house-steward suitably, in an old blue livery coat with tarnished buttons, and

patched on the elbows—relic of a suit dating eleven years back? And he reckoned on his fingers the servants of long ago; reverted wistfully to the wine bins he remembered in the cellars, the plate he had helped to polish: where were those vases and epergnes, those trays and salvers, which had erst shed illumination on tall beaufets in the dining-room? Andy tossed all night on his bed, tormented by such memories, and at first light was afoot through the corridors, opening the windows, and realizing the disastrous state of things.

"Oh, troth the paper's all hangin' off wid the damp," he exclaimed in a kind of despair. "I must get some paste; an' for all I'm in dhread the wall will never be the right colour again. An' there's a crack in the plaster of the ceilin', just behind that iligant bunch of grapes; that's beyond my docthorin, anyhow;" and he scratched his gray head ruefully. "May be a dash of whitewash might hide the split awhile; but what wud become of us if it took into its head to come down of a suddent while the company was at dinner, an' me standin' behind Sir Hugh's chair, as grand as anything with my white gloves on! oh then, musha, what'll be done at all to have things dacent?"

But, conscious that mere bewailing could not mend matters, Andy set about kindling huge turf fires in the principal rooms that possessed chimneys able to draw. By-and-by, when he had scrambled on the roof, and was mixing mortar for his repairs, the smoke from these caused him much annoyance, which he bore philosophically, till a great clamouring of birds overhead aroused his ears.

"The jackdaws! I wondher what ails them? Och, sure it can't be that their nests is a-fire!"

He sprang from shelter of the parapet where he was working, to behold a thick smoke streaked with red blaze issuing from a low chimney clothed with ivy. Andy's sight and strength deserted

him for one bewildered moment; then he rushed *along the leads*, precipitated himself through the trap-door, and in a few seconds had his arms full of wet straw, stuffing it into the grate and up the flue.

"I'll smother it—I will: what a fool I was, never to remember them bastes at all. Biddy Keenahan, my girl, run out for another wisp of hay, an' steep it well before you offer to bring it in. The crathurs of birds—all their little summer-houses is burned up. Patsey, like a good boy, run up on the roof with a pail of water, an' fling it down to me through the chimbley."

Torrents of blackened water were soon streaming over the boards: not all Biddy Keenahan's strength of arm and scrubbing abilities could subsequently erase the stain. "We'll cover it up wid a carpet," quoth Andy. "Sure, what matther is anythin' so long as people don't see it!"

But he was not left to struggle alone in his effort to uphold the family respectability on the forthcoming occasion. His unwearied endeavours had rectified a few of the worst features of decay and dssorder before Mrs. Ferrol and her daughters arrived; and that energetic woman had not been in the house an hour before she commenced a thorough investigation of all its needs. She selected a set of rooms to be put in order, sent for tradesmen, and superintended them personally; was everywhere at once, keeping everybody industrious, working herself hardest of all. Her own hands upholstered the furniture. The old family coach was brought from the stables and refitted, and the Loftus arms emblazoned anew on the door-panel. A less inventive genius would have been puzzled for horses; but she borrowed two from the plough, and two from the tenants; caused them to be stall-fed and groomed into a semblance of sleekness, and boldly drove with them to shop in the neighbouring town, where the petty traders, overawed by the equipage, gave her everything on credit. Three or four gray-

haired servants had been hired in Dublin, who did duty as old retainers.

The lady's sorest trouble for the time was the smart English waiting-maid who had come over as Mildred's attendant, and whom it was difficult to keep ignorant of the household expedients. Bland was quick enough to surmise that the elegant little dinners with which she was provided were not the habitual servants' fare; nay, she had discovered Mr. Andrew, the house-steward, eating potatoes privately, in a manner leading to the conclusion that such was his evening meal. She had her suspicions of that most fatal fact to menial natures, the poverty of the *ménage*, and she despised all connected with it heartily; and when Mrs. Ferrol sent her a glass of claret at luncheon, felt it to be a blind and a deception, and her thin lips sneered as she drained it. The bridegroom's valet made much the same estimate of his entertainers.

"'Tis the rummest house I ever was in, this," he observed, as he sipped his sherry after dinner the second day of his arrival. "The idea of setting me and you to dinner together, Miss Bland—not but I'm very 'appy, of course," bowing his head gallantly—"'specially as we are to be hinmates of one roof soon; but it is a picter of the state of the hupper servants' arrangements. Why not all dine together? I ask naturally. Why, but because they haven't things reglar and suitable to such as us. *I* don't think they have silver forks in the hall—no, nor beer either. And they give *us* sherry!" Mr. Tisdell emptied his glass. "Not so bad as I feared. I wish I had a walnut or two; but 'spose they don't grow in Hireland. Let me prevail upon you, Miss Bland"—holding the decanter towards her. "The stuff is really tolerably good, considering." And soon, upon similarity of circumstance, they established a mutual confidence, and moved about behind the scenes at Castle Loftus like a pair of alien spies, seeing through all poor Mrs. Ferrol's little efforts at pretension, and openly sneering

at the same, to the intolerable wrath of Andrew the butler, never deceived for an instant into the belief that the carriage horses were thoroughbreds, or that the cellars were laden with wine.

Likewise at the wedding breakfast, do you imagine that Mr. Tisdell was not in the secret of the sumptuous service of plate which glittered on the table, or that he thought those centre pieces and candelabra were family heir-looms? Could he not have revealed the very name of the establishment in the metropolis whence they were borrowed? Perhaps so; and he certainly had his doubts about the true ownership of the diamonds in which Mrs. Ferrol was arrayed. Beneath his obsequious demeanour he noted also that other sham—her tears. Not a few natural drops, but a steady distilment, heaviest when the health of the bride was proposed. Mildred sat upright, cold and calm, and beautiful.

CHAPTER VII.

SETTING UP IN LIFE.

THE happy pair had departed; and the inhabitants of Castle Loftus were experiencing that collapse of feeling which invariably succeeds festive excitement. The plate and diamonds which had played a part in the pageant, were packing up by the man who had come down in charge of those valuables: the gray-haired retainers were to evanish by the coach in the morning: the carriage horses were immediately to be restored to their pristine employment of drawing home the harvest. Piece by piece was the scenery taken down; and Mrs. Ferrol, lately the anguished mother, stood on the bare stage with perfectly dry eyes, looking fixedly into the future.

Like the baseless fabric of a vision had melted away the gaieties

of the London season, the pretty house in May Fair, the faultless carriage and liveries, the page in green velvet: evanescent as the glitter of a rocket, and leaving nought behind but certain unsightly liabilities. After months of lavish expenditure, which the parsimony of years could not cover; after months of inconceivable labour in upholding the appearance of wealth and fashion, with literally no foundation of means; she had gained her aim—a great match for Mildred. Was it worth the endless trouble, the meanness, the falsity, the humiliation it had cost? Mrs. Ferrol's conscience was at least in a gratified state. "I have done my duty by my child, and am entitled to her perpetual gratitude; my self-denial has not shrank from painful embarrassments for her sake." In such complacencies the lady wrapped herself comfortably, while devising a score plans for extrication from the meshes of debt which environed her.

"Sir Hugh, you must be more stringent with your tenants; it is absurd to listen to the never-ending excuses which Irishmen have always ready for not paying their rents," was one of her spoken reflections. "Scroogem should get a hint to look sharp. What is the meaning of those three townlands on the Killbaggin estate paying nothing? Take care that the rogues are not feathering their nests for America."

"Scroogem assures me that they are miserably poor," said Sir Hugh, looking up from papers. "See, there is his last letter."

"I would distrain, if I were you," said the soft-hearted lady. "It is rather worse, I think, that you should be a beggar than they."

"Hope there's no fear of that, my dear Selina," he said, good-humouredly; "though this summer's expenses have certainly proved heavy. I am just now telling Scroogem that I must have money, however it is raised. But for the confused intricacy of title, I might sell a slice or two; and people are so shy of lending on Irish landed security, that it is impossible to borrow a farthing."

With his usually open brow uneasily contracted, he resumed and completed his letter; the result of which was, that the agent did put on the screw, raising the valuations of the farms in many places, exacting large fines for renewal of leases, and evicting divers families: and so the falsehood of the Ferrols' life in London reacted towards those poor peasants, in distress and ruin.

Horace was sitting by during the above colloquy; waiting, indeed, for an opportunity to introduce the subject of his own exigencies. For this young officer was, as usual, "hard up;" and, when coming over to Mildred's wedding, had a faint hope that his uncle might enable him to liquidate one or two accommodation bills, which were floating about the money-lending world with his name attached, and monthly swelling in dimensions, after the nature of such paper. His countenance was not brightened by the conversation he had overheard; and with a muttered exclamation he left the room, going on the terrace in front of the windows to look for his brother Hugh, who was smoking a cigar tranquilly as he walked up and down in the evening light: a clever-looking young man, with deep-set eyes and decisive lips.

"'Twould be better to be a footboy, I vow, than an officer in her Majesty's service!" was his irritated exclamation, as he joined him. "I'll throw off the red coat some day—see if I don't—and go to the backwoods of Canada."

"What! and you have acquired a millionaire brother-in-law this morning?" the other rejoined, with a slight sarcasm in his tone. "Why, man, all our fortunes are made for life by that alliance!"

"I wish I could dispose of my share of the fortune for a hundred pounds," answered Horace, gloomily, as he kicked the pebbles before him. "How likely Mr. Euston Ferrol is to relax his purse-strings for my sake! I'll have to exchange to the colonies, Hugh, with my lieutenancy within my grasp."

Then followed a detail of embarrassments, accumulating monthly;

of total inadequacy of means to meet the expense of keeping up an appearance, like the other officers; of wounded pride, of recklessness, nay, of possible disgrace. How the young ensign's cheek burned with shame as he repeated the threat of an angry creditor —to report him to the colonel of his corps, or to the Horse Guards, if his claims were not satisfied before a date now rapidly approaching.

"I know that it is mainly my abominable pride, which will not brook that the other fellows should perceive my narrow circumstances; and you know ours is a crack corps, and we do things twice as dashingly as others: but I have made a vow that when I get my lieutenancy, and am clear of these hateful debts, I'll turn over a new leaf, exchange into an Indian regiment, where they have double pay, and leave off all my extravagant practices for evermore. If only this incubus were removed! Oh, Hugh, you don't know how horrible it is to lie down with debt smothering every thought, and dream of sponging-houses and all sorts of horrors, and wake again with the same dead weight upon one's spirits and life: it is fearful!"

He flung out his clenched hand vehemently.

"I did feel a little of that at the university," replied Hugh, after a pause: "but then, we medical students have a way of getting over such disabilities, for we're not expected to keep up any appearance, except clean linen. I am sorry for what you tell me: I wish I was able to help you effectually; but we must only do the best we can." He sat down on a bench at the end of the terrace, and took out a pocket-book. "I earn a little money sometimes for writing medical articles, and other odd jobs; I'll give you the half of what I have; there's a ten and a five, and I only wish it was a great deal more."

Horace wrung his hand, while the tears started to his eyes. "It is mean of me to take it," he said; "but it may stop the mouth of

that clamorous messman a while longer; and if I am ever able to repay it, Hugh—"

"Send it by a bank order to-morrow, and don't mind being grateful: it is a very unfashionable failing now-a-days."

They took some turns in silence. Opportune as this help was, it met but a tithe of Horace's debts. "You certainly should confide in Sir Hugh any embarrassment of such a serious nature," counselled his brother. "Probably he will not be severe upon you.

"Now, to change the subject, would you like to hear something of my plans? My mother wants me, since I have become an M.D., to take a house in London, and begin practice there: I came out this evening purposely to think over the advice."

"Enormously expensively," suggested prudent Horace.

"Yes; but London is the place for the development of talent—the only place for a young man to commence his climbing of the ladder to fortune and to fame," was the reply. It was not difficult to divine which way Doctor Hugh's inclinations tended. "I am rather a favourite with Sir Lancett Pyke, the distinguished court physician; his influence might get me the visiting surgeoncy of some hospital to begin with."

Hugh's face coloured slightly, under his brother's eyes; who merely uttered a whistle.

"As his niece Agatha's dowry, perchance. You need not blush so furiously, Hugh: we all know that a physician must needs be a married man; 'tis as essential as his lancet. She is a pretty little girl, though unfortunately there are seven of them——"

"I don't intend to marry the entire family," asserted Hugh.

"Then you do intend to marry the charming unit? I congratulate you, and wish you the practice and reputation of Sir Astley Cooper."

"What I fear," said Hugh, after some further badinage, "is that my mother, with her ideas of the prodigious importance of

appearances, will want me to set out in a style quite beyond my income. I would not underrate any influence that could conduce to final success; but still, the risk is very great, and the chances of failure preponderate. I don't wish to stake my all upon one throw, like a desperate gambler; I want to leave myself a chance of retrieval even should I fail; and failure would be ruin, utter ruin, if I allow my character to get the least involved, by undertaking expenses which I have no reasonable prospect of being able to discharge."

The cigar had grown so cold during this long speech, that Hugh flung it away among the bushes.

"But a clever fellow like you," said his brother—who had a very sincere belief in Hugh's abilities—"one who has already done so much as a student, and is favourably known to the masters of your profession—why, you must get on: there cannot be a doubt of your success. Did not all the celebrated surgeons begin upon nothing? John Hunter, Abernethy——"

"Your brother is not to be named with geniuses, Horace," interrupted Hugh, shaking his head; "and I must not encumber myself at the outset of my career, seeing I have not the limbs of an athlete."

Another silence: and Hugh spoke, hesitatingly.

"If Agatha is of my mind—and I trust we shall agree in this as in all other things—we will live at first in some small house in a back street, and as we prosper, so arrange our expenses."

When he communicated the result of his cogitations to Mrs. Ferrol, she had much to say against it. Hugh should remember that, to get into fashionable practice, he must make a fashionable appearance: few would employ a physician resident in a shabby locality, and have faith in those medical abilities which were not guaranteed by bringing wealth to their possessor. The young surgeon's knowledge of the world corroborated these remarks:

it was undeniable that a handsome carriage and a handsome residence were, to most people, conclusive in a physician's favour, because seeming to indicate abundance of fees, flowing from trust reposed in him by a multitude of patients. Still, he thought it would be better to set up in a modest way, and perhaps, after a year or so, step forward into public view, as if pushed higher by force of irresistible merit.

Something in the latter idea recommended it to Mrs. Ferrol's innate love of what children call "make-believe," and we of a larger growth denominate "sham;" and she assented to the proposition, when placed in this light. But Hugh had difficulties from another quarter: Mrs. Carnaby Pyke could not endure that one of her daughters should enter married life in a style so much inferior to what they had known in their father's house.

How many young hearts, formed to love and cherish one another in the most sacred of all human ties, have been forced asunder by considerations like these, and have shrunk into solitary existences, bearing burdens difficultly alone, which had been light if mutually shared! How many of the unloving marriages which leaven society with a ferment of wretchedness have by the same means been cruelly compelled! "Appearance" is the world's Moloch; and most men and women pass through the fire to it, willingly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BELGRAVIAN HOME.

In a large, handsome apartment, commanding a good view of the Park, with its pleasant green expanses and clustering trees, an old gentleman was seated beside one of the windows. His lustreless eye roved over the prospect, apparently noting nothing of the

beauty spread before him; and the nerveless white hands, every muscle and vein distinct under the shrunken skin, lay on his knees listlessly. His hair is thinner and whiter since we saw him last—of that withered bleached hue, which differs as much from the "glorious" hoary head of healthful age, as doth the fruit decayed at core from the ripe richness of perfect maturity. The once firm lines of his mouth have been touched with some helpless indecision: over his whole figure was an air of wavering and weakness. He was disposed to be fretful this evening.

"Has Mr. Euston returned yet?" he inquired often, in his indistinct utterance. "He ought not to be absent so long, when he knows that I am still unable to attend to business—as I soon shall be; did not Doctor Proby say so?"

The servant made some guarded answer.

"Before November, I hope. What month is this, Brooks? I fear my memory is not so good as it used to be; but nobody is growing younger. I never could recollect dates well. When I am at the banking house again, in November, Mr. Euston may take his holidays. But young men have no forethought—none whatever."

The last sentence was muttered as if to himself: the helpless anxiousness upon the feeble face deepened.

"Brooks, give me my stick: I shall walk up and down a little." With the help of the man's shoulder and a stout cane, he was able to accomplish two or three turns.

"I think I walk better than I did yesterday:" his eyes examining the attendant's face for assent or the contrary. "I think I *am* better."

"Well, perhaps so, sir; you must be best judge yourself; and, while your appetite is good——"

"Ah, yes," said his master, brightening at mention of the one enjoyment of his faded existence: "Francoz is an excellent *chef*;

his dishes would do credit to Ude himself. A carriage has stopped at the door, Brooks; perhaps Mr. Euston is come."

When he was long in making his appearance, the old man grew chafed, and Brooks soothed him; for Brooks knew that this would be no ordinary interview. He stood a little behind his master's chair, as the bride and bridegroom entered.

With the same look that she had worn at the wedding breakfast, the same cold proud beauty, she went forward to the greeting of her husband's father, and bore his scrutiny. He pushed aside his son's extended hand, gazing at the stranger.

"Who—who is this?"

"My wife, father—Mildred Ferrol."

Still he gazed searchingly at her, as if he were concentrating his scattered rays of intelligence into one focus of remembrance, and it bewildered him.

"Speak to him," said her husband.

With a womanly impulse of pity and protection towards the eternal claim of age upon youth, she took his hand in hers, saying gently, "Will you not welcome your daughter, sir?"

The old man turned away his face, and wept. Crouched over the arm of his chair, his hands concealed the pitiable tears: they were confounded at this ominous greeting on the threshold of their married life.

"He is nervous," whispered Euston; "unaccustomed of late to see strangers:" thus he would have apologized to his wife. But the old man sobbed out:—

"Oh, Euston, I warned you. I told you it would be ruin—ruin. I told you that marrying without money would be ruin. I warned you. My poor boy—my son."

"Go away, Mildred; my father is not well," said Euston, his own face whitening now. "Brooks, open the door for Mrs. Ferrol, and remain in the ante-room till called."

Brooks did not fail to endeavour to improve his uninteresting sojourn in the ante-chamber by applying eye and ear successively to the keyhole; but his reward for his pains was trifling, as they sat in a window beyond his ken, and his astute young master took care that their words should be inaudible.

Since the illness that had stricken him, the old man feared his son with the dread which the weak-minded entertain of the strong and unscrupulous. When left alone, under the gaze of those stern bent brows, he cowed like a beaten hound.

"I did not mean anything, Euston; I am not what I used to be; I often say what I don't intend," was his apology, as his hands vacillated feebly over his knees. "She must not mind me."

"You gave her but a sorry welcome home," his son said. "I hoped you had been getting stronger, sir."

"I'll not do it again, Euston," he said, eagerly, grasping at his son's coat. "I'll not frighten her again; but, indeed, Eustie," he added, recalling an abbreviation from the childish days, "you wanted money, and the firm wanted money, and I told it to you. I am better; Dr. Proby says I may be strong enough by the close of the year, perhaps."

Euston did not think much of the likelihood when he looked at the decayed figure of the old man, who had apparently forgotten the subject in hand, being diverted by mention of his own health.

"Meantime," resumed his son, "it would be wiser if you, sir, would refrain from any allusion to circumstances connected with the secret history of our firm; and, for your own sake, think of its affairs as little as possible. Your nervousness augments the danger indefinitely, and most unpleasant consequences might ensue from an unguarded expression of yours."

"I see; yes, I'll remember that, Euston. I'll be silent about it, from this time, until I am well: in November, Dr. Proby says."

And the son left him sitting by the window in the fading light, soothing himself by repeating this softly.

Mildred's new home was a fine one. But to-night, though entering on her rule, she did not look upon the splendour which was henceforth hers with the complacency she had imagined. Perhaps she was dispirited by Mr. Ferrol's mournful reception; perhaps she was haunted by that undefined loneliness and longing, which any great change in our lives—even though it be an advance and aggrandisement—calls forth involuntarily among the feelings. She wandered through the superb drawing-rooms, chilled and pensive; finally sat down upon a couch of Utrecht velvet, and, without remembering the words, felt the sense of that inspired sentence—"What good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?"

Somebody touched her.

"Oh, dear Hugh, dear Hugh! I am so glad to see you!" She wrung his hands, and clung to him as if they had not met for years. He was surprised at her demonstrativeness—Mildred, ordinarily so cold, and whom he had looked to find changed by affluence.

"Ah, Hugh, the sight of a home face! The dear old times!"

Which old times, we may remark, she had not at all loved in passing; but now, because they were gone and distant, and the present so widely different, their hard features, distasteful near at hand, were softened by a halo of remembrance.

"And how did you like Paris, Mildred?"

"Oh, very well; it was tiresome enough sometimes. I am glad to be settled at home."

She spoke with a wearied air; the *ennui* of fashion seemed already to envelope her in its poisoned robe.

"You have a fine house here, my sister," said Hugh, after a pause. "How beautiful is the arrangement of colours in this room!"

It was panelled in rose damask, relieved with dull silvered mouldings.

"A fancy of mine," said Mildred. "But tell me, Hugh—you know I have a deep interest in matters matrimonial—tell me something about Agatha."

"There is hope of a softening," he said; "Mrs. Carnaby seems inclined to bate terms somewhat; and we have a stanch ally in Sir Lancett Pyke, the magnate of the family."

"We were glad to read of your appointment to the —— hospital; that's a stepping-stone to fortune, Hugh."

"Yes; if I am allowed to work my way on, and am not required, being an insignificant frog, to inflate myself as large as an ox," he replied.

"Your appearance ought to be suitable to your connexions, Hugh," said his sister. At which he laughed, and answered, "Certainly!" in a manner slightly disconcerting.

"Where do you intend to live?"

"That's one of the points at issue between Mrs. Carnaby and me. I cannot afford the expense of a fashionable residence, and she says that a daughter of hers shall live in no other. I have not got over that difficulty yet," he said, with rather a sad smile. "They have yielded the carriage question at present."

Here entered Mr. Euston Ferrol: Mildred stopped short abruptly.

"Were you reading poetry?" he asked, in an insinuating yet disagreeable tone. "Pray do not let me interrupt you." She answered nothing, by word or look.

"Clouds already," thought Hugh, and then diverged into a lover-like reflection upon the wild improbability that he should ever speak to Agatha and be met with a sullen countenance; or that there could exist any subject on which they would not have the fullest mutual sympathy. We may here state that the

glamour of this delusion survived his marriage about three months.

But the train of thought into which he had fallen made him such dull company, that he shortly took his leave, and carried his sweet mirage of feeling out into the congenial moonlight.

"Your family are exceedingly early in paying their devoirs," said her husband, standing on the hearth-rug. He had been chafed up-stairs, and neither felt nor looked amiable.

"I was very glad to see Hugh," she remarked simply, hardly noting the manner of Euston's speech, for her thoughts were otherwise engaged.

"Of course; and I have no doubt but he was also charmed to see *you*." The implied reflection on her brother's disinterestedness she would not notice.

"I suppose he has the family mania for living beyond his means," continued her husband. "He had better not count on help from me under any circumstances. If there be one thing I despise more than another, it is the meanness of a false appearance."

She knew that he was ill-humoured, and wisely refrained from reply; but by-and-by, when he seemed rather ashamed of the ebullition, she repaid him with a manner most repellent. He fell asleep on the sofa after tea; Mildred looked abroad upon the silver glory flooding all the heavens, and, with a shrug of her shoulders, pronounced it "dismal;" tried to read a book, but could not fix her attention. Gazing at the fire was her final resource. She saw a variety of things there, as do all idlers. Thus passed her first evening in her splendid home.

And from such evenings she rushed into the dissipation of fashion. Perpetual excitement might fill the void in her nature. But throughout that vast Hall of Eblis, called "the gay world," she found beneath every robe the burning heart; and her own was no exception. What matter, so long as the robe was jewelled?

CHAPTER IX.

BENEATH A PALL.

THROUGH "drear-nighted" November and bleak December, gradually old Mr. Ferrol's weakness increased. There were some calm, tender days, when the residue of leaves clothing the park shook down silently amid a mild sunshine. Feeble old Mr. Ferrol watched them from his seat by the window, whence he rarely moved now, for Doctor Proby's prediction had not come to pass; and Brooks shook his head over it in the servants' hall, whenever he condescended to a chat with the footmen, and had inward misgivings about the tenure of his place.

With a pitiful look, the old man would say, "Perhaps he meant November next year, Eustie; do you think he did? It's a long time to wait; but I suppose I must be patient:" and the wintry smile was painful. So that his son did not very often ascend to his apartments, for the sight gave him an unpleasant thrill; but he relieved his conscience by telling Mildred to visit him daily. And, whenever it did not interfere with her fashionable amusements, she complied with the request; at first feeling the hour exceedingly irksome, but the sweetness of being kind made it more palatable after a time.

At last, in January, came a day when he was content to lie in his bed, through very inability to rise. Hitherto he had been jealous of his feeble strength, and could not bear to betray infirmity; but he seemed suddenly to have lost that care, and to want nothing but stillness and repose. Brooks considered it a very bad symptom: the physician said his patient was as usual, but he would see him again in the evening.

It was a foggy afternoon in the city: lamps shining through the coffee-coloured cloud, thickening densely over the crowded streets; muffled clocks striking on high invisibly. Mildred had found the day dreary in her great drawing-rooms: even into her luxurious boudoir penetrated the depression of the weather. Uneasy thoughts of the old man upstairs would intrude upon her book, dulling its most piquant sentences. She had seen him in the morning, and felt the indefinable change upon him. What if he were going to die?

The lovely lady grew paler, and a sort of shudder passed over her; she stirred the fire, as if moved by sudden cold. She kindled the wax lights on the mantelpiece, but looked no more at the book in her hand. An old-fashioned quotation dwelt in her ear, and would not be silenced: "To die, and after that the judgment." It was an uncomfortable reverberation.

"I wish he would see a clergyman," she said to herself, and, after a little thought, wrapt a light shawl about her shoulders and went upstairs. Standing at the bedside, she saw him sleeping; very worn and wearied was the aged face; she knew that the final rest could not be far distant. He had been in such light pauses of slumber and waking during the entire day, Brooks said; once he had asked for her, but would not allow her to be sent for. Low as the whisper was uttered, the sick man opened his eyes at the slight sound.

"Is that Mildred? I wanted you awhile since," he said feebly: "I forget what it was. Perhaps it may come back," he added, "if you wait. How dark you have this room! Why doesn't Brooks light the candles?"

A pair was burning on the table, not many yards from him: Mildred looked involuntarily at the valet: their thought was simultaneous. The latter replied quickly, "The afternoon is yet early, sir; but there is a fog."

"Get lights, then," he ordered. Brooks went for a lamp.

"Come near to me, Mildred; let me feel your hand. I had something to say to you about Euston—your husband Euston. I remember now. You have been a great misfortune to him, Mildred. If he is ever ruined, it will be because of you."

"Because of me!" and the proud blood mantled in her cheek. "I don't understand, sir!"

"Nay, leave me your little hand," the old man said, limply caressing it with his own weak hot fingers; "I am glad you don't understand, my dear."

He was speaking more like his former self than he had lately done. She was surprised at his steady collected manner.

"I tell you truth; Euston's circumstances are not so splendid as people imagine. By marrying you he lost the chance of a wealthy wife, who might have helped him out of difficulty: be kind to him, Mildred; if he is ever cross, he has cause to make him so: be loving to him, Mildred."

Her hand was dropped as Brooks's step entered the room. Affected by his entreaty, but curious to fathom the cause, she dismissed the servant, with a direction to see young Mr. Ferrol on his arrival from the city, and tell him where she was. But the invalid had apparently lapsed into a doze again. She watched for the next languid opening of his eyes to whisper:—

"Will you not tell me what is the danger? I am Euston's wife; surely I ought to know; perhaps I might be able in some way——"

"Poor little woman! not able at all; you cannot know; but be gentle to him, and bear with him in everything, as you would if you could understand his devouring cares. And don't ask him to explain things that may seem unaccountable. If I was only well and strong again; but I'm beginning to think——"

There was a long pause: he did not frame his fears into words, and she was too nervous to speak.

"I'm tired now, very tired, Mildred; but don't go away; I could like you to read aloud something; your voice is lulling. If they would but bring the lights," he said querulously.

"I have quite light enough, sir," she rejoined, a little fear stealing over her. "What shall I read?"

"I suppose the Bible," was his answer. It was what she would have proposed, but for the timidity which all feel in performing an unusually worthy action. She had to go to her own room for the richly adorned violet velvet book which went with her to church on Sundays; and then, knew not where to select an appropriate chapter.

Has it ever struck any one how pre-eminently the Bible is a book for the living, more than for the dying? A book to be daily companion and counseller through the turmoil and toil of human existence, rather than a manual of devotions for the death-bed? Descriptions of dying scenes do not abound; only incidental reference is made, commonly, to the last stage of temporal life; for the Bible is designed to aid the Christian in his daily walk through this world, and not merely to prepare him or to comfort him when the grave draws near. But men make this mistake continually, and imagine that they can settle soul-matters all right whenever needful, by a recourse to that Divine word which they have through their lives systematically neglected.

Euston, coming in with noiseless step, found his wife thus employed; a roseate flush overspread her face as his unpleasantly penetrating eyes rested upon her. But the glance softened much; for he was pleased at her attention to his father: he put his hand on her head caressingly.

"He was awake a moment since," she said; "I think he is very much weaker this evening."

"Did he ask for *that* himself?" Euston touched the Bible.

"Yes."

The son seemed to consider it a serious symptom: he bent over and listened to the fitful breathing. When he raised his face, Mildred saw a strange agitation written there; he disguised it with a handkerchief raised to his quivering lips. She feared to ask him the cause, for the old man's warning recurred forcibly; but there was the gulf of a secret between her and her husband, thenceforth.

Late in the evening, a message came to them from the sick-room. A change had come over the invalid. Brooks thought that Doctor Proby should be sent for.

Ay, summon him with all haste; there is sore need for his ability now. Grievous need, when the clay house of the soul is breaking up beneath the conqueror's blows, falling asunder from its shrieking tenant, who will be expelled into the wide waste of eternity, homeless and friendless! Come, Science, thou art powerful; build up the shattered tenement again; even for a week—a day—an hour, retard the final dispossession! What! mute to the appeal, standest helplessly beside the unequal struggle? O poor soul; poor, blind, groping soul, tottering on the verge of a black infinitude.

By midnight all was over; and he knew whether the wealth for which he had spent his life was worth that fearful price.

The due days afterwards, his heir honoured him with a grand funeral—an unlimited funeral, in point of expense; for Mammon can be worshipped even in such last pomps of the flesh. Numbers of mourning coaches paced along mournfully after the sombre plumes, through the soaking rain. Aslant swept the grey drizzle from a uniform leaden sky, upon scores of carriages illuminated with armorial bearings; empty were they, like all this parade of grief—a symbol of the world's sorrow for its lost votaries. But representative footmen, as wealth's emblems, were abundant; likewise burly coachmen, in dripping weepers. The second mourning coach contained the decorous melancholy of the brothers

Horace and Hugh Ferrol; in the next carriage to theirs were Sir Lancett Pyke, the celebrated court physician, and Doctor Proby, the family surgeon, speaking softly of remarkable cases lately occurrent in their respective practice; and a little beyond, the lawyers were speculating on the will, and the probable possessions of their late client. Perhaps as sincere grief as any was that of poor Brooks, whose circumstances were unsettled by the event; but who, in the course of the same evening, consoled himself by resolving to retire from service, marry the cook, and set up a little eating-shop with their joint savings; which in process of time was accordingly done.

And so passed on the gloomy *cortège* to a dank city churchyard, where the family vault had been opened, and the bells swung requiem over neighbouring wildernesses of housetops. A few idlers gathered from the crowded streets outside to look at the rich man's sepulture; to see how well appearances were kept up even to the grave's mouth—appearances of unbounded wealth and of dutiful sorrow. And down came the impartial drizzling rain steadily upon all—upon the bare-headed group at the vault, and the *gamins* climbing rails for a view of the show.

Two of the lookers-on had been loitering round the exterior of the church during the ceremony within—shabby men in brown coats and slouched hats, beneath which looked forth sharp furtive eyes. They waited for something, and were satisfied to bide their time, evidently; now they were partially sheltered behind a yew-tree, and some words passed between them.

"Easy and respectable, Jack; let's do the thing neatly; don't be headstrong, but wait till you see me touch, then come up quick on the other side."

They separated; and Jack, making a long circuit among the tombs, became an attentive listener at the furthest edge of the crowd; while the other sauntered directly forward, with a straw in

his mouth, and his hat frankly thrown somewhat back. Presently the people dispersed; the chief mourner proceeded to his carriage, which immediately drove away; and Horace Ferrol, proceeding with his brother towards theirs, felt himself touched on the shoulder.

"Please, sir—oh, it ain't no use, sir; there's two on us." This in reply to a violent effort to throw him off. "Take it quiet, sir—a wehicle's a-waitin' at the gate, an' you can get off without making any noise, or excitin' the public, sir."

"What is it for?" asked poor Horace, huskily.

"At suit of Snipp and Company, ninety-five odd," was the reply. Then deprecatingly: "But you see, sir, we're attracting the notice of the public by delay; it's wiser, when circumstances is clear agin us, just to take 'em easy."

Hugh was greatly concerned; but he could give his brother no help: he suggested an immediate application to Euston Ferrol.

"Every conwenience for writing to friends at Mr. Naggs's," chimed in the bailiff. "Jack, you with the driver; me and the gentleman will be enough inside—unless you, sir, would take a seat? That'll do, cabby; Doctor Ferrol has his own carriage; drive on—to the old place, you know."

On reaching "the old place," Horace wrote a few frantic lines to his sister Mildred, and waited impatiently for the answer; in what tumult of remorseful and miserable thoughts, only a debtor in the creditor's grasp can understand.

CHAPTER X.

CONCERNING MR. NAGGS'S.

In her drawing-room before dinner, her deep mourning setting off exquisitely the fairness of face, and shoulders and arms, Mildred is waiting for her husband. A seriousness has fallen over her with that black dress and its occasion; she has been reading some good grave books, and feels almost religious. Nay, if religion did not involve the laying aside some of her most cherished fashionable amusements, she does not really know but it might prove the safest and best course after all! The mild melancholy of her present sensations is rather enjoyable, and she fancies that it must be a species of piety, and is pleased with herself accordingly.

Wherever Death has flung his mighty shadow, there is apt to spring up in the gloom a parasite—religiousness—so like the heaven-born fruit of true religion, that hundreds are deceived by it for a time; but as the shadow which called it forth grows dimmer and more distant, and the sunshine of the world glows again over the darkened heart, the false plant collapses—withers into Sodom ashes; and has but rendered more sterile the soil that bore it. And Mildred's imagined piety was like this.

Her husband came in with a letter in his hand. "Your brother's writing," he said; "James was bringing it, and I took it from him. He says the messenger is waiting for an answer."

Mildred brought it to the shaded argand lamp on a side table. "Immediate," was written in the corner. "His excuses for not coming to dine," she thought; "but what a shabby blue envelope and red wafer!"

It was well that her husband was gazing into the fire, engrossed

wholly with his own reflections: he saw not the start, the spasm of emotion, the sudden and fear-stricken glance towards himself. Reassured, by perceiving that he had noticed nothing, she said with as much carelessness as she could assume:—

"I shall not be more than a moment writing the answer;" and, crushing the letter in her hand, through very nervousness, she left the room. Arrived in her boudoir, she hastily opened the secretary, where, in a concealed drawer, she kept whatever money she possessed; but it amounted to only a few sovereigns and two or three notes—little more than a fifth of what Horace wanted; for almost everything she required, or fancied, was purchased upon bills paid every quarter, and thus she seldom had much cash at her immediate command. Some moments she sat with a very miserable and perplexed expression on her face: there was nothing for it but an appeal to her husband; and she knew well that upon no subject was he so unapproachable. She penned a hurried note to Horace, promising to send him help later in the evening, if possible, and, leaning on Euston's arm, proceeded to her gorgeously appointed dinner table.

And the colossal powdered footmen lounging in the hall, clothed in the richest mourning, their vast calves in delicate silk, their shoulders run to seed, as it were, with superfluity of tags and festoonings—do you suppose they did not comprehend the note and its messenger? Trust the argus-eyed ministry of servants to detect whatever, in your domestic life, you are most anxious to conceal. Thomas winked sidelong at Jeames, who in his turn thrust his tongue into his cheek knowingly; and they had a slight confabulation with the envoy, resulting in a confirmation of their shrewd suspicion that "that 'ere young hofficer had been a goin' it rayther 'ard, and was at last took by the beaks. Jeames could ha' foretold the catastrophe the night the young gemman gave him half a suvring for caring his hat; and we all know what

hensigns' pay is," added the lackey disdainfully. Poor Horace fancied he had produced a magnificent impression by the said donation, very little aware that the weak effort to keep up appearances was seen through on the spot.

Mildred had a sort of consciousness that they knew all about it, and quite feared to glance at them as she passed by; but in her presence these great masses of humanity seemed to have no thought but a stolid deference.

The silent dinner went on, Mildred's courage oozing away as the dessert drew near, when she must speak. Her husband drew his chair to the fire after the first course, sitting with his brows on his hands. He had not a headache, he said, in answer to her inquiry. He was perfectly well. He did not want anything, except to be let alone. At long intervals these questions were asked, and replies given without raising his face.

When the servants had withdrawn, and on the table were fruits and wines, Mildred rose and went over to his chair; she kneeled down on the hearth-rug beside him. He looked up in surprise, but somewhat gratified at the submissive gesture, withal.

"Don't say to me what you said awhile since," she asked; and her face was humbler than he had ever seen it. "I ought to share your cares and griefs, Euston—ought I not?"

"I stand alone," he said, "now that my father is gone." He turned to the table, and drank wine rapidly—several glasses.

"Not alone, Euston"—and she put her hand upon his—"not alone."

"Oh, I mean alone in responsibility—in care."

"If it could lighten the care, even ever so little, to talk of it to me, I would be very faithful to any trust you reposed in me," she said. "Your father told me once that I was to be very gentle and loving to you always, because you had great and unusual causes for vexation."

His sharp eyes were in a moment fixed piercingly upon her. Perhaps she had pronounced the word "unusual" as an experiment.

"What else did he say?"

"That you had sacrificed much for my sake, and that I was always to remember it," she replied.

"Nothing further?"

"Nothing." Her truthful eyes satisfied him. There was a pause, and she moved her jet bracelet round and round upon her arm. In a very low voice she spoke:—

"Euston, I am going to tell you something which has deeply troubled me;"—again his keen inquiring look: "Horace has got himself into a dreadful difficulty."

"Nothing new," was the reply. "He is a spendthrift; I have no patience with him."

"He has all along been in a false position," she said, "endeavouring to keep up the appearance of a man of fortune in that expensive regiment. He wrote me a note this evening—will you read it?"

"And why should he keep up such appearance when he had no means?" demanded Euston, severely. "The fellow calculated upon my help, I suppose; and not a single farthing."

"Oh, Euston, don't say that:" her hand was pressed against his lips. "If you do not help him, he will be utterly ruined."

"I might have known that some appeal of this sort was coming, by your affectionate demeanour this evening," he observed, coldly.

"You do me injustice," she said, her beautiful eyes brimming with tears. "Will you not even read his letter?"

He perused the lines of entreaty with a stern countenance and a hardening heart. "How am I to know whether this is true? It may be a swindle likewise."

"Euston!" His wife had risen with flashing eyes. "He is

incapable of such falsehood and meanness! Go to the place and see for yourself, before you charge him so foully."

He turned doggedly to the fire again, and, without another syllable, she walked away to her drawing-rooms. Did no echo of conscience repeat in his ear that applicable word "swindle?" If so, he drowned it with more wine.

Poor Mildred wept most bitter tears in the solitary splendour of her reception-rooms; until after a time an idea struck her. She had jewels in abundance. Soon the cases were ransacked, and a few of the more valuable and least capable of identification selected for sale. Her maid Bland might be able to dispose of them. But it was a painful humiliation to confess to a menial her embarrassment for money, and, tacitly, her small influence over her husband. She sat brooding about this. Would it not be better to speak to him again? The selling of her ornaments would greatly incense him, and he must know of it sooner or later: the wiser thought prevailed, and she went again to the dining-room.

Master had gone out, without mentioning whither; so said the butler, who was removing the wine. Perhaps he had relented, and was gone to free Horace after all. How she would thank him! And now that the reaction had come, she began to see her brother's folly and extravagance in their true light; began to see how pitiful an ambition it was to ape in expenditure the wealthy officers of his corps, and to think more mildly of her husband for his natural repugnance to assist one whom he deemed a determined spendthrift.

Her husband, having come to the conclusion that it was cheaper to aid Horace now, and send him to India to make his own way, than permit him to be cashiered, or cut adrift on the world as an insolvent pauper, had called a cab, and driven into the city, where, in a by-lane of a by-street, near Chancery Lane, stood the sponging-house whence Horace had dated his letter. He was

set down at the gate of a courtyard, which looked like the outworks of a gaol, aad was conducted through some dingy passages, catching a glimpse, through a door ajar, of a dinner-room resounding with boisterous conviviality—of that stamp which is loud in proportion to its miserable hollowness. The revellers had not been able to induce Horace to join them, though the master of the house, Mr. Naggs himself, had come with the invitation, backed by Mrs. Naggs's compliments, and advised the new comer not to be down-hearted—it was always so with the young gemmen the fust time they was took: but bless 'em! they was soon quite 'appy, what with the best society and every comfort, though he said it that oughtn't. And if Captain Ferrol wouldn't give them the pleasure of his society at dinner, perhaps he would stand treat for the company in a bottle of claret all round? 'Twas the usual thing for a gemman to do.

The ascription of brevet rank rather exasperated than mollified Horace, who was already in a fever of rage and mortification; he looked so threatening that Mr. Naggs speedily withdrew, wondering what he had done to provoke such a storm. And the unhappy young man paced up and down the narrow limits of his room, filled with remorse and self-contempt, making vows for the future, if by any means he might escape the present peril. But, knowing his brother-in-law's hard nature, he had little hope from him. He could see nothing ahead, except the debtors' prison, the insolvent court, disgrace, and beggary. He had thrown himself upon his bed, exhausted with the strength of his emotions, when Euston appeared.

"My wife received your note," he said, after a moment's survey of the wretched apartment. "This is somewhat different from your extravagantly furnished rooms at Chatham, I think!"

Horace made no reply; he was too humiliated, too miserable.

"I am come," the other said, seating himself at the table and

drawing out a memorandum book, "*solely* out of consideration for my wife and for myself, to discover how you can best be helped; but, mark me, no dissimulation or reservation of the truth; you must tell me precisely how your liabilities stand; and you must promise that as soon as you are gazetted lieutenant, you will take measures to effect an exchange to a regiment serving in India, where, upon the double pay, even your extravagance may contrive to live."

These implied reproaches were hard to bear; but Horace was compelled to endure much more. The man who had resolved to benefit him was essentially ungenerous. A rigorous examination followed; close investigation into his debts, every item and its particulars written down in that methodic manner which is apt to impress the debtor with a species of despair, as he finds the aggregate increasing indefinitely. Not a few stinging comments were interwoven. How his proud heart writhed! Perhaps he felt something of the hate said to be caused by an ungracious benefaction. When it was over, and the memorandum book replaced:—

"One of my clerks will come here in the forenoon of to-morrow, to pay the particular debt for which you are detained, and the necessary fees; for I choose previously to make inquiries respecting these floating bills of yours. Good night."

The salutation was not returned by Horace. Fastening the door as well as he could—for the lock was of course broken—another storm of impotent wrath and misery swept over his spirit, ending in the utter wretchedness of weeping.

CHAPTER XI.

A FALSE START.

AMONG Brooks's earliest customers, when he set up in the eating-house (and a little of the green-grocery) line, was the lately established *ménage* presided over by Doctor and Mrs. Hugh Ferrol. For the lover had carried his point by perseverance; and Mrs. Carnaby Pyke, mother of his beloved, looking round upon her seven fair daughters—among whom his was the only proposal that had as yet fallen—really felt a slight longing for the excitement and *éclat* of a wedding. The desire was but woman-like; and when she had got over the heart-rending fact of her dear Agatha's carriageless future, she was speedily induced to be yet more lenient, and finally threw herself into the preliminaries with zeal.

Mrs. Ferrol the elder came up to town for the occasion; and it must be confessed that these estimable matrons, while at times intensely amiable over the approaching festivity, at other times indulged in little suppressed skirmishes, of course having reference to the welfare of their darling children. To begin with, there was a slumbering ill-will, on one side at least. Had not Mrs. Ferrol actually married her daughter to the man whom she (Mrs. C. P.) had secretly elected for her own son-in-law? The latter lady felt worsted and outwitted, and, as a matter of course, unamiable, which had effect, strange as it may appear, upon the furniture of Agatha's house. Both ladies were indeed perfectly agreed that Hugh should make a good appearance at first setting out in life; consequently, that the visible arrangements of his residence should be as handsome as possible; but with regard to the colours, or nature of the upholstery best calculated to accomplish this end,

they were commonly altogether at variance. The drawing-room might possibly have had a harlequin effect, had not the magnate uncle, Sir Lancett Pyke, interposed with the gift of a cabriolet sofa, and table to match, and requested that the room might be *en suite* with these. In the study and dining-room they had field for their differences of opinion: the rest of the house was left very much to take care of itself; for who was ever likely to see it?

"What a pity the rooms are not larger," was one mother-in-law's lament. "But all in due time; I have no doubt but my Hugh's abilities will elevate him to the first rank in his profession, at some future time."

"It is very gratifying to be able to see good fortune in the distance so clearly," rejoined the other lady. "I am so short-sighted that I can never perceive it until it is actually present."

"Because you are of a bilious disposition, my dear Mrs. Pyke, and see everything clouded with green and yellow; while I am of a sanguine temperament, and of course all the world is rose-colour to me. I own I prefer my peculiarity to yours: but, *revenons à nos moutons*—the drawing-rooms might be thrown into one," etc.

Mrs. Carnaby often got routed thus, when she provoked a passage of arms. Secretly, to a trusty confidante, she lamented Agatha's fate in becoming connected with such a *mère terrible,* and counselled the young lady herself to keep her husband's mother as much off her premises as possible.

Nobody could be more charmingly ignorant of domestic details than was Agatha, when the wedded pair returned from their short tour in Wales, to find themselves in their own house, face to face with fortune, in a manner. She had indeed, during a month, been sent daily to spend an hour in the housekeeper's room, for the ostensible purpose of learning some management of family matters; and her mother had duly informed her that, as she was about to be a poor man's wife, she must study the principles of economy,

though always subservient to a good appearance in the eyes of the world.

"For your husband's prosperity in his profession," repeated Mrs. Carnaby for the twentieth time, "depends on the way he is thought of by the world; and you, my dear Agatha, must take care that his house and table present the appearance of easy circumstances and a flourishing practice. That was the manner in which your late lamented aunt Lancett got her husband on. When they had a wretchedly small income, one would think he was in the receipt of at least a thousand a year—all through her good management; and you see what he has eventually become."

Agatha, trembling on the threshold of the greatest change in her woman's life, was not greatly encouraged by the notable example thus set before her, of one whom she remembered as a little withered old woman, with a most careworn face and cankered disposition. Yet she could have small anticipation of the Sisyphus-toil which such a life would actually be. To her young hopeful heart there was nothing very dreadful in being poor with the man she loved; but an oppressive weight loaded her thoughts when the infinite cares of the pretentious existence indicated by her mother as absolutely necessary, rose into view, shadowing all her future. Poor Agatha felt she had not abilities for it, nor sufficiently unflagging spirits for it, either. But she went to work as well as she could, in those preliminary lessons from the housekeeper, whose instructions referred chiefly to the making of certain *recherché* sweetmeats and *entremets*. It was likely to be so very useful to Mrs. Hugh Ferrol to know, for instance, how to construct a Charlotte pudding *à la Bohemienne*, or to dress lampreys *au vin de Bordeaux!*

With such exalted professional attainments as these, it is not surprising that the bride should find the ordinary affair of making

tea rather embarrassing, from its very simplicity; and a few blunders ensued, involving much waste of material, ere she discovered for herself the governing rule of that domestic mystery. Hugh was considerably amused by his wife's mistakes, as yet: partly because anything she said or did, in these golden days of early marriage, was beautiful and becoming in his eyes. He even undertook to instruct her in the chemistry of cooking, feeling certain that such knowledge of the theory must greatly help her to direct in the practice. But somehow she could never bring these principles of natural philosophy to bear upon the chops or coffee. The coagulation of the albumen in a leg of mutton was a scientific phrase, absolutely beyond the comprehension of that illiterate Goth, Mrs. Rhodes, her servant-of-all-work; who was wont to express the same by the undoubted vulgarism "biled;" and whose rules for the attainment of that end were of a nature so exceedingly uncertain, that the meat was generally either raw or in rags. Mrs. Rhodes had other trifling peculiarities, besides this of lax cookery. She fought incessantly with her fellow-servant, the man —a pompous individual, whose business was to be the show animal of the establishment, and who, perfectly conscious of his mission, would do little but brush his master's clothes and attend at table, where his absence would have been a positive relief to those attended. In fact, it had been a condescension for Mr. Marks, who had lived in the best places, to hire with a family that did not keep a carriage; his wages and effrontery were high in proportion; and, as aforesaid, he was fully aware that he was kept as an item of respectability, and not for usefulness. But Mrs. Rhodes, (who had been engaged on the principle that anybody would do in the kitchen, as she would never be seen,) having a spirit rather sour by nature and by practice, was endowed with an inherent necessity for quarrelling, and, moreover, could never be brought to understand the limits of Mr. Marks's business, or rather idleness. He

indeed bore majestically with the woman, serene in his own power and superior position: his silence awed her more than volumes of objurgation.

Once or twice their mistress could not help thinking, how greatly more comfortable it would be to have but one good and experienced servant-woman, paying her of course double the wages that the slipshod and ignorant Mrs. Rhodes received, but dispensing with the oppressively useless butler, whose cost was so enormous. Alas for the iron yoke of "keeping up appearances!" She must submit to this loss of home comfort, and to many others even more serious, rather than incur the ruinous suspicion of narrow means.

At first, this dubious Mrs. Rhodes was intrusted with the purchase of all things necessary for the household. As for Marks, his mistress seldom asked him to do anything but what, of his own proper motion, he undertook. But Agatha, looking at a newspaper one day, came upon a column of prices which surprised her, as proving that she had for a couple of months been paying more for the ordinary articles of consumption than any one else in the metropolis. It seemed very singular; but on mentioning the fact, in all innocency of mind, to Mrs. Rhodes, it was met by a storm which fairly blew the astonished lady into the safe port of her own drawing-room as quickly as possible. Marks, listening in the pantry, smiled grimly at his mistress's simplicity.

"What is it all about?" inquired Annette, the sister, who was spending the day with her: they took it in turn, generally, to keep her from being lonely.

"I—I really hardly know," was Agatha's puzzled answer: "Mrs. Rhodes seemed so angry when I said I had seen in the paper that beef was ninepence a pound instead of ten-pence halfpenny, what Brisket has been charging lately. She got quite into a passion, and put her hands on her sides, and positively frightened me, her countenance changed so. I don't know what I shall do: there is

MRS. HUGH FERROL'S SCHEMES OF RETRENCHMENT EXPLODED.

nothing in the house for dinner, and I am afraid Mrs. Rhodes is affronted, and will refuse to go to the butcher's."

The kitchen dignitary *was* affronted. She kept wrathfully muttering over the tea-cups, as with much clanking she washed them; and these growlings could be heard distinctly on the upper landing.

"I am sure I did not mean to hurt her feelings," Agatha said: in fact, she would probably soon have wrought herself to the point of begging the woman's pardon, had not Annette, a sensible girl, rather less tender-hearted than Agatha, given utterance to a dire suspicion as follows:—

"Don't you think it might be possible that Mrs. Rhodes has been in collusion with the butcher, and they have shared the overcharge between them? I think she must be in some way guilty, or she would not be so furious."

Agatha said that it was mean and unkind to suspect without positive proof; but various little circumstances rose to her memory notwithstanding. The unaccountable propensity of all the cold joints sent from table to diminish and disappear; likewise, after being at the victualler's, Mrs. Rhodes would return with a palpable odour about her, which not even Agatha's inexperience could attribute to either the meat or vegetables.

"Suppose we went out," quoth Agatha, suddenly, "and bought the things ourselves?" Just the idea Annette liked; the two girls got ready, and set forth, though the elder's timid heart soon misgave her. "I hope it is quite lady-like to do this," she said.

"I can't see the ladyhood of staying at home to be robbed," was Annette's rejoinder.

"But I am very ignorant about such things," the mistress of a house said: "I would not know sea-kale from asparagus; and as to the joints of meat, I could just distinguish a leg of mutton from a round of beef." Annette laughed; and all notable housekeepers

who read this will immediately despise poor Agatha; but let me tell you that she did not make her purchases so badly as might be expected from a complete novice. On the contrary, she had some little pride in relating her achievement that evening to her husband. After trying to make him guess where she had been, in which he, obtuse man, signally failed, she narrated the unexpected ire of Mrs. Rhodes, which had driven her to make trial of her own powers. But Hugh was not at all pleased.

"The trifling pecuniary gain did not counterbalance the inappropriateness of the act," he said; "and I have to request that you will not again do such a thing. Send Marks with your orders in future."

"Hugh dear," after some silence, "how much happier we could be in a smaller house than this—I mean a house that cost less; your mind would not be so anxious as it must be now."

"I suppose everybody has his own share of anxiety," he said; "and we must remember that our expenditure is for a purpose which cannot be attained without it. Everything depends on the appearance a physician makes before the public, whence must come his patients. Would you believe now, Agatha"—he turned to her with a smile—"that I have come round to the conclusion that it was a mistake not to have had a carriage from the outset?"

"Ah, Hugh, it would be a dangerous experiment," his wife said. "Wait for a few months, at least."

"Wait?" he repeated irascibly, "while my best days are slipping by, and men, whose audacity is their highest qualification, step before me because I hesitate! Your mother was speaking to me of it no later than this day, and persuading me to make the trial."

Doctor Ferrol well knew that he was in the wrong, wherefore his irascibility; and he felt the falsehood of even his existing position, wherefore his endeavour to convince himself of its expediency by repetition of the old weak arguments. Agatha looked back upon

that evening as the first when he had spoken crossly to her, and showed the beginnings of the gloom which afterwards grew over him. The young wife was weak enough to cry over it in secret; but Hugh had been petulant unconsciously, she was sure; she must endeavour that he have no such cause in future as that of the heavy household expenses. To diminish the outlay, and yet keep up the same appearance; perhaps she stayed awake long in the night-time thinking over this problem, for her eyes were heavy next day, as with care and needed sleep. But she had discovered a grand measure of retrenchment, which had the important recommendation that nobody could know of it. She would give up her own daily glass of wine at luncheon. True, she was not very strong, and it had always been considered essential for her at home. But, as her simple and unselfish arithmetic calculated, in four months she must thus use a dozen of wine, all to herself; why, during a year it must amount to seven or eight pounds, she thought, which would now be clear gain. Agatha was quite elated at her contrivance, and as gleeful as if the eight pounds were already a *bonâ fide* possession. And when she subsequently accomplished a rejection of wine at dinner also, she felt really as if the finances of the family were broadening. Poor little wife! the dull Hugh never suspected the real reason of her sudden distaste for all forms of juice of the grape; nor could he further divine wherefore she never seemed to need gowns or bonnets.

CHAPTER XII.

HORACE SAILS OUT OF THIS STORY.

MRS. FERROL and Agnes had spent the winter months in lodgings at Cheltenham, where the elder lady's genius for expedients came into play again. As before remarked, she was a woman of multiform resources; never seen to greater advantage than amid complications suited to appal an ordinary feminine temperament. Her means being extremely narrow, the business of her life, at present, was to make them appear easy, and if possible affluent. This difficult performance involved much behind-scene contrivance, which a fastidious person might denominate shabby and mean; but was it not done with a view to eventual externals, which were uniformly creditable? I fear that Agnes did not duly second her mother's endeavours; nay, she rather harassed her by a certain inattention to the effect proposed, and occasionally by a brusque truthfulness which would derange Mrs. Ferrol's most elaborate schemes, as a broom may annihilate a score of ingenious webs by a random stroke.

For such inattentions, Agnes had some excuse. Mr. Richard Wardour was at Cheltenham with his father, who was an invalid; but, during intervals of dutiful attendance, he found leisure to deepen his acquaintance with Mildred's sister. They suited one another; and Agnes felt very happy on the day when, in a walk beneath the lime trees, he asked her to be his wife. Mrs. Ferrol did not coincide in any such feelings. Since Mildred's marriage, her ideas had become proportionably exalted; and she expected something better for Agnes, with her connections, than a mere gentleman-farmer.

"Besides, child, you have opportunities such as your sister never had: you go into the best society with her, and meet the very first people. I cannot consent to your being thrown away on this Mr. Wardour, and going to vegetate in a mouldy seclusion for the rest of your life. What would your brother-in-law say to such a match?"

"I know what Mildred would say, mother; she would tell me to be happy if I felt that I could;" and Agnes blushed faintly; "for her own life, with all its wealth and grandeur, is not happy."

"I don't know why it should not be," replied Mrs. Ferrol, tartly. "She is hard to please if her position in life does not suit her taste. But you talk like an enthusiastic child, Agnes: are you aware that Mr. Wardour is wretchedly poor?"

"I know that he is not rich, mother; but——"

"Oh, of course love in a cottage seems very fascinating: a white-washed cottage with roses looking in at the windows. I always hated roses, except in the hair of an evening, and the country is my abomination. I shall refer Mr. Wardour to your brother-in-law. I suppose he has little more than two hundred a-year, since that law-suit went against his family. The idea of living upon *that*, with anything of a presentable appearance!"

Mrs. Ferrol's emphatic silence for a full minute had the effect of several notes of admiration. Agnes worked on without reply, her mother regarding her downcast face.

"As a warning against marrying on a small income, I would have you remember the case of your brother Hugh and his wife. He is already in difficulties; and she looks unhappy and careworn, poor thing, from the endeavour to make both ends meet. Hugh required a more energetic wife, in his position."

"But, mamma, they have brought trouble on themselves, by trying to appear rich when they are really poor: I hope that—that we should never want to do so. I hope that we should not care to keep

up appearances, but to live simply and truthfully on our means, whatever they might be."

From which speech, and from the speaker's colour, it may be surmised that Agnes and her lover had sketched such arrangements to their mutual satisfaction.

"Not keep up appearances! then you may as well quit the world altogether, and take shelter in the backwoods at once," exclaimed Mrs. Ferrol. "Not keep up appearances! how would you expect to be recognised by society?"

"I would not want to be recognised by society, mamma; I would rather that society left me alone. It is a hollow, false-hearted world, that values one just by the appearance of wealth that one presents. I always disliked pretences and make-believes of every sort," said Agnes.

"Your warmth on the subject is excessive," her mother remarked. "I don't call it pretence, to do as other people do, and to keep up one's proper position, even at a sacrifice of vulgar comforts. One is despised otherwise."

Agnes thought, valiantly, how little she would care for such contempt; but she said nothing just then.

Euston Ferrol happened to differ totally from his mother-in-law respecting the merits of the proposed alliance: he cordially gave his consent and blessing. Nothing more? A twenty-pound note to the bride; which gift rather incensed Mrs. Ferrol, who had hoped for, at least, a fine wedding from his Belgravian mansion.

But his approbation having decided the matter, Agnes entered upon a tranquil engagement-time, and when its limit drew near, in the early summer, she begged hard for a quiet wedding, without guests or finery. Neither could be, she knew, without dangerously involving her mother's scanty finances, concerning which that good lady would have cared little, provided she could indulge her favourite passion for display. Many of the bills for Mildred's

trousseau yet remained due, particularly a large sum to Madam Jupon. Agnes was resolved that no fresh debts should be incurred for her. Whatever her own fingers could accomplish in the way of work, she toiled through personally. What could not be paid for at once, she would do without. It must be confessed that this rule narrowed her wardrobe materially; but do you suppose that the bridegroom reckoned her worth by her number of silk dresses?

One of Horace's last days in England was chosen for the event. Few besides the clerk and pew-opener—a frosty-faced woman in black bonnet, who deemed it incumbent upon her to cry over the 'ansome couple—were aware that a wedding was taking place that morning in the quiet church; no parade preceded or followed; no formal *déjeunêr*, with its pompous drinking of healths and division of bridecake. To say truth, the pew-opener aforesaid was rather scandalized at the simplicity of the affair, and perhaps thought her tears waste fluid over a pair whose union was not more splendidly celebrated. And there were other dissentients from the manner of the proceedings. Miss Araminta Puff, the confectioner's daughter, pronounced the cake "extravagantly small," and Miss Twiddle, the milliner, confidentially observed that "she never see a plainer drest bride;" and Mrs. Vellum, wife to an adjacent attorney, "never heard of a shabbier wedding in all her existence;" which opinions were likely much to injure the new Mrs. Wardour!

Horace and his mother went up to London next day. The troop-ship lay at Gravesend, and his detachment was already on board for India; he had but a few hours more of English life for many a year. Large were his resolutions concerning the new phase of existence opening before him. He would now quite cast off the old extravagant habits which had well-nigh ruined him; and, severed from former associations and companions, he would endeavour to practise economy. Nay, he was sanguine about it: a little self-denial would save money towards the purchase of his

company; he would yet be a prosperous man; and, perhaps—his brow darkened at the recalled scene—he should be able to return to his stern brother-in-law the money paid for him so ungraciously that its gift was almost as much an injury as a benefit.

Hugh went with him to the transport. "You're not looking well, old fellow," Horace said, as they stood on the deck together; "nor speaking like yourself: what's the matter?"

"Up-hill work, that's all," was the reply, with a sickly smile, "more than I can undertake being on my shoulders at present; but I hope it may lighten, else I don't well see what is to be done. Ah! Horace, you have a clear stage before you. I'm fairly committed to the course now; and I would not care, except for the shackles upon me."

"Shackles!" repeated Horace, doubtfully. "Why, Hugh, unless you are in debt, I don't understand the phrase: and, by the way, my dear fellow, that reminds me of an old obligation: I have no use for money on board ship, and may draw on the agent for three months' pay due when I arrive at Calcutta:" so Hugh was fain to accept the sum he had given his brother on the terrace at Castle Loftus.

"The fact is," he said, "we set out on too expensive a scale. So there is a dismal discrepancy between outgoings and incomes; and my poor Agatha is wearing herself out with the effort to economise."

"Courage!" exclaimed Horace, wanting to say something cheery, just to disguise the brimming fulness of his heart. "Rome was not built in a day. Faint heart never won——; but you have the fair lady already, you lucky fellow! I wish you'd let me write a cheque for you on Cox's. I have some of the exchange money still."

Hugh had some difficulty in preventing the generous fellow from doing as he proposed; it would have relieved him of a pro-

digious deal of slumbering sympathy. They talked further of their plans and prospects, these brothers, sitting together on the quarter-deck, and looking over into the dark shining shadow of the great troop-ship upon the water.

But there is a cry that the last boat is going ashore; and, with a fervent wring of the hands, they part. The breeze being favourable for going down Channel, even that slow old tub the "Benares" travels rapidly towards the blue water, heavings of which soon extinguished patriotic regrets and all other sentimental sensations, in the bosoms of Lieutenant Ferrol and his companion subalterns.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUR NEIGHBOURS' EYES.

AGAIN was the London season at its height. Eddying through all ranks, the tide of fashion flowed. Of course Mrs. Euston Ferrol went out a great deal, because of the position in life which she held, and Mrs. Hugh Ferrol likewise went out a great deal, because of the position in life which she was to achieve. It would never do to have a rising young physician's wife moping at home, instead of making friends for herself and her husband abroad: thus reasoned the imperative mother, Mrs. Carnaby Pyke, and therewith agreed Hugh himself. The prestige of good society must advance his fortunes, and he could not possibly do more, personally, than appear for a few minutes occasionally at an assembly; his practice was supposed to be much too extensive and exacting for any such sacrifice to fashion. And so he stayed at home, chiefly engaged in the very medical employment of perusing the periodicals in his study; while his wife, handsomely dressed and

jewelled, represented his interests in public, under the guardianship of her mother.

She was sick of the sham very often: intolerably weary, sometimes, of the effort to seem gay and unconcerned, while her poor heart was aching with a hundred petty anxieties. And though Mrs. Carnaby Pyke was very solicitous about her daughter's standing in the *beau monde*, she was by no means sympathetic on the topic of domestic straitness of means. Perhaps there was policy in her avoidance of such confidences, for she could not have materially aided Agatha: her own family being numerous, and her appearance in society sufficiently imposing to absorb a larger income than Mr. Carnaby Pyke was supposed, at his club and elsewhere, to possess. Her only care for Agatha, at present, was that her wardrobe should be of creditable costliness; but, as she observed, of course the young couple must struggle; and so long as they kept up appearances, nothing else was worth a thought.

Did the young wife ever wish to be openly poor—poor as a peasant, living in some lonely place far from the world's echoes, where there should be no need of the pretences and make-shifts which falsified her whole existence, no myriad eyes of dreaded society upon her, to be propitiated and blindfolded incessantly? She may have desired any reality, however hard, as a relief from the hollow deceit environing her daily life. Heavier than fetters on wrist and ankle it was, and daily increased in tension. The worst result for both husband and wife was the slow-growing irritability of both; the minds ill at ease reacting upon each other in alienating looks and words; the gradual sapping of domestic happiness by secret care, and fear for the future.

Begin by a false action, and there is a sad necessity for its continuance: as the first link of a chain, it draws others after it in numerous procession, increasingly heavy, steadily enlarging—the last harder to break than the earliest. A clever writer terms this

acknowledged necessity the world's tribute to truth; because exacting consistency in deception, that it may present an image of the feigned truth. Be this as it may, we know of few things more mournful and wearying than the life which is spent in a perpetual effort to seem what it is not.

In the midst of the gaiety of the season, Mildred sometimes amused herself with thinking how hollow and insincere it all was; everybody tired of everybody else, but must pretend to be pleased and delighted. And the everlasting platitudes, repetitions night after night, of the same speeches, the same deceitful compliments, the same empty nothings—no wonder she was very weary of it sometimes!

Miss Dora Ferrol, her husband's aunt, was on a visit with her about this time. This juvenile-looking lady, who hoped that the world would take her for Euston's elder sister, or at least a coeval cousin--forgetting that the same world is most rigorous in allowing full and long dates, shrinking not even from addition where necessary, but never guilty of subtraction—was as assiduous as ever in repairing and glossing over the rents of envious time. And a whiter pair of shoulders were not among the fair ones present; nor a more delicate bloom, nor a more artless *chevelure*. Yet, whom did these productions deceive? Not one of the eyes of that society for whose approbation she toiled was hoodwinked for a moment, but penetrated straight through the disguise, to the yellow wrinkled old woman within.

Did not the same keen vision pierce through Agatha's little effort at appearances, and see, with rigid correctness, all that she would fain believe concealed? When Dr. Ferrol had a dinner-party, society knew well that the plate and wines were gotten at an expense of daily privations and future involvements. One pair of its argus orbs, existing in the person of an acute Mrs. Glanvil, resident at the opposite side of the street, was upon the Ferrols'

house perpetually. Their quarter of the modern Babylonia was eminently genteel and dreary, being equally removed from the opulent and industrial spheres, but inhabited by the most unexceptionable people. It was a region of high-bred silence, save when carriages drew up to the doors; the vulgarity of trade and of traffic was far from it; a dismalness of the utterest respectability hung over it. One had an intuitive perception that the street was not easy in its circumstances; house dreaded house, lest the domiciled skeleton, swathed in Babylonish garments, should be detected. And so did Mrs. Glanvil, the pretentious wife of a lawyer in moderate practice, hold in awe sundry of her acquaintances—among them, Mrs. Hugh Ferrol; while Mrs. Hugh Ferrol, being of course a unit in the aggregate society, was also slightly feared by Mrs. Glanvil. Thus these good ladies did many things for each other's sakes, went to many expenses from the dread of each other's opinion, yet would neither have confessed to the occult influence. And upon both sat the great social *Vehm-gericht* of—everybody else.

In obedience to which mystic despotism, Mrs. Glanvil screwed and pinched mercilessly behind scenes, that she might in public be profuse and independent. Sons and daughters were trained adepts in the art of appearances: except the unsophisticated youngest, who sometimes marred his parent's fairest semblances with an unlucky revelation; as when he betrayed surprise or pleasure at things which he should have regarded with everyday indifference. For truth has a strong hold in a child's breast: he does not find dissimulation an easy lesson. Mrs. Glanvil had to teach it to her young people with perseverance; afterwards they became hopeful practitioners, repaying her maternal assiduities by devotion to the same cause. Did she contemplate the consequence—a wretched home, full of bickerings and void of love? Discontent was a natural fruit. when comfort was sacrificed to show;

and of how many English firesides is this the canker, eating out the core of happiness! nay, how many lives are warped and distorted in their outset, permanently crookened from the paths of rectitude by such early falsity of circumstance!

Without doubt, Hugh Ferrol might trace much of his propensity for display to a similar cause. Overborne, for a time, by a common sense gained in rough rubs with the student-world, his old tacit training to regard "appearances" as the chief thing, resumed sway easily when it seemed to have a foundation of reason. He was now committed to a continuance, as the losing gambler will throw farther and stake heavier, to recover his luck. He was certainly making way in his profession—but slowly; and the hot heart of youth is rarely content to wait, much less when there is upon it a pecuniary pressure. His mother thought him looking worn and ill, when she came up to town for a short visit in the autumn; and was surprised—but wisely showed it not—to see his chagrined manner about trifles, and the frequent acerbity of his disposition. She knew well what was wrong: being in all the arcana of the household, its secret was patent; and a little kindly conversation with Agatha drew it forth in words. Mrs. Hugh had seldom or never any opportunities for confidential confessions—an exercise, of all others, dearest to woman's nature: she had too much proud delicacy to admit her sisters to the knowledge of a trouble involving her husband's affairs. And now that she met with a legitimate confidant, in the person of his mother, the floodgates of long pent-up feeling were opened easily. "It is killing me!" was her passionate expression; and she drooped upon her hands the fair girl-head, wreathed with hair which had not yet lost its sunlight sheen, and gave way to uncontrollable weeping.

Mrs. Ferrol the elder, duplex woman of the world though she was, had still a substratum of goodnatured heart; and she did deeply compassionate this poor young creature, laden with a weight

of care too heavy for nerve or brain. Also was Mrs. Ferrol shrewd, and had no idea of being an injudicious comforter; therefore, when she was calmer:—

"My dear," said her mother-in-law, "poor people always go through such struggles as these, if they want to get on in the world. Certainly, if Hugh could be content to vegetate in obscurity all his life, burying his talents and so forth, it might be unnecessary to keep up the appearance you do, and without doubt you would have many more comforts and less anxiety; but, knowing your affection for him"—Mrs. Ferrol had a habit of rustling her black silk, and here she shook it out stiffly—"I may confidentially ask, whether you would wish to sacrifice his future advancement to your present ease?"

"Oh no, no," said the young wife. "But I am not strong enough, nor clever enough."

Secretly did Mrs. Ferrol think the same. She had rather despised Agatha as a puny pretty girl, without tact or ability, and would have preferred that Hugh had taken to wife some strong-minded woman, older than himself, and more capable of advancing his interests than the one he had chosen. But she said, kindly putting her hand upon Agatha's:—

"My poor child, you are nervous and depressed. You want some variety—change of air and scene. London all the year round is too much for you. You will just come into the country with me for a little, down to Agnes in Shropshire."

"I cannot," Agatha said; "he would be very lonely. If he could come, I should enjoy it greatly."

"I will talk to Hugh about it," was Mrs. Ferrol's conclusion. "Suppose you got into confirmed ill health, you foolish child, what a burden you would be upon him! Of course, you will be sensible and obedient, and do as he thinks best."

Further suspicions, and just ones, had Hugh's mother that

Hugh's wife had even stinted herself while seeking to reduce the household expenses to their minimum: likewise, that she had overtasked her strength by personal exertion, to make up the deficiencies of the incapable Mrs. Rhodes, her combined cook and housemaid. Hugh blamed himself for his blindness and disregard; all his tenderness revived at thought of her failing health, and Agatha was happier, for a little while, than she had been since their bridal month.

The elder Mrs. Ferrol's movements were quickened by receipt of a missive such as discomposed her in the first chapter of this tale, namely, a note from Madame Jupon; the matter of which she was prepared for, being a demand of the sum of £43 7*s.* 4*d.*, balance of account furnished a year previously; but it was the manner that puzzled her, as scarcely concealing a threat. For ten minutes she was perplexed, and then a light burst upon the affair: her countenance resumed its usual superior serenity. Wherefore? she had not the money, neither knew where to find it; yet would she satisfy the creditor.

Driving with Mildred in the afternoon, she admired her bonnet, and remarked on the excellence of Madame Jupon's millinery. To which Mrs. Euston replied, that she had lately patronized a certain Madame Coiffeuse, whose taste suited her better, and from whom the Duchess of X—— and the Countess Y—— got their court-dresses. This had her astute mother divined, and now requested that Mildred would come to Madame Jupon's and open a fresh account, as the only feasible means to gain respite for the settlement of her own. Fully successful was the scheme: the Frenchwoman could not possibly be more polite; as for the *bagatelle* due by Madame Ferrol, it would do at any time; as a matter of business, bills were sent round by the clerks of the establishment at stated seasons. And so they understood one another.

CHAPTER XIV.

QUIET HEARTS, IN A QUIET HOME.

"You must not be surprised, my dear, to find that Agnes and Richard live in an exceedingly plain manner; in fact, I may say, with a total absence of style. They are indeed too regardless of it," said Mrs. Ferrol the elder, as she and Mrs. Hugh sat in a railway carriage, rapidly scouring along the North-Western line. She thought it her duty to prepare the stranger for disappointment in Mrs. Wardour's cottage home. "Richard has peculiar opinions—in fact, I may say, eccentric; he would never do for a man of the world—never. In his rural position, of course so much is not expected; but I must regret that Agnes can so easily sink from her own position in life;" and thus Mrs. Ferrol went on, till Agatha began to wonder what sort of an uncivilized place she should find at Langholm, and what sort of uncivilized manners in its inhabitants.

A farmhouse upon the side of a gentle eminence, trees clustering behind, a sunlit view of level countries before; a clothing of virgin's bower and china roses all about it to the roof. Perhaps it was a common-looking place; certainly there were no evidences of wealth; but that refined tastes dwelt in the cottage might be discovered from the finer kinds of flowers blooming in the grassplots, and the careful neatness of the exterior. Agatha's tired heart was conscious of a restfulness in the very look of Langholm, even before receiving the warm welcome of its owners, which she felt was not to be taken at London valuation, as signifying a feeling the fifth of the expression; in their sincere eyes she read reality.

It was certainly a very unpretending *ménage;* limited circum-

stances could be plainly enough traced in the arrangements. The furniture was neat and simple; white muslin and rose-colour will make any room look well, and Nature's best ornament of flowers was abundant. Nothing could be further removed in style from the splendour of a first-class metropolitan drawing-room; but good taste was the genius which converted the Langholm chintzes and Kidderminsters into adornments as becoming as the embossed draperies and Brussels carpets of a wealthier house. Anything more rich would have been incompatible with their means, perhaps also with their principles.

Agatha soon found that in this family was nothing to conceal: no curtaining of wretched deficiencies with outward appliances of wealth. But the mother-in-law could not be reconciled to such plainness of living. The attendance of a little maidservant, instead of a footman or page, grated upon her sensibilities. She pined for the display and consideration among her superiors in rank, which had been her aim through years. The neighbouring nobleman's family, who had a distant visiting acquaintance with Agnes, was to Mrs. Ferrol an unmitigated trouble and source of disquiet, because of her longing to be on closer terms of intimacy with them; their carriages passing by the gate discomposed her; reports of their festivities and battalions of titled guests, actually kept her awake of nights. R—— Manor was Elysium to her imagination. At last came a general county entertainment, combining *fête champêtre* and subsequent dinner party, to which the neighbours at Langholm were of course invited. Great was Mrs. Ferrol's pleasure in the prospect: it gilded her meditations for a fortnight previously; she even sent to Madame Jupon for a special dress to wear, which, with its appurtenances, swelled her outstanding account from forty-three to fifty-four pounds ten. The simplicity of her daughter's preparations quite annoyed her.

"You seem to forget, Agnes, that you will meet people of the

highest rank, and that your dress ought to correspond with your company; certainly you ought to wear something handsomer than that second-rate black silk: what will be thought of you? I am sure Mr. Wardour would willingly give you a new one if you said it was necessary."

"I dare say he would, mamma; but I know that he could not afford it just now, without going in debt, and you are aware of his invincible objection to that. While his father's will has left our affairs so unsettled, we must be very cautious in our expenditure."

"But such a trifle as a silk gown could make no perceptible difference."

"Ah, mamma, seven or eight guineas is a serious sum to us at present, especially when my mourning has cost so much this summer already. That black silk was an expensive one three months since, and I have been careful of it; and my bonnet has not been much worn: a fresh border is all it wants."

"I am no advocate for the open confession of poverty," her mother rejoined, with rather an offended air. "I cannot see the merit of proclaiming that one cannot afford a new dress, even for Lady R——'s *fête champêtre.* I don't suppose there will be another lady present, who will not go to some trouble and expense to make a good appearance on such an occasion."

"And, dear mother, what would be gained by it? The debt would be a real evil; the impression made upon Lady R—— or others of the company a very doubtful good, if indeed any one notices what I wear at all. I cannot imagine that Lady R—— will know whether my silk is three months or a week old, so as it looks neat and tasteful. You have seen how plainly she dresses herself, and so far I shall only be following her example."

Mrs. Ferrol was by no means convinced: she next attacked Mr. Wardour on the subject, selecting, like an able tactician, a moment when the forces of the enemy were detached. Agnes had

left the room about her housekeeping, after breakfast, and her husband was writing at his secretary when the elder lady began.

"Richard, I want to speak to you for a moment."

He laid down his pen and looked up at the handsome woman standing beside him.

"About Agnes; I want you to give me *carte blanche* to dress her for this affair at Lord R——'s."

And Mr. Wardour, like a dutiful husband, replied: "Whatever she wants is of course at her service; I'll ask her about it."

This not at all suiting Mrs. Ferrol's ends, she said: "Oh, she has got some absurd idea of your not being able to afford her the necessary dress, though she really requires one. I have reasoned with her in vain. You must interpose your authority."

"Certainly, where needful."

Now his laconic answers, though apparently all she could wish, were not pleasing to his mother-in-law; nor the deep quiet eyes, intently bent upon her face as she continued:—

"Or, better still, give me leave to write to London for her dress. You know that in such an assembly of rank and fashion as we are likely to meet, your wife should make a good appearance."

"I wish her to do so," he said, "and am resolved that she shall."

But, Mrs. Ferrol being a keen physiognomist, discerned a muscular action about his mouth, which rather suggested the possibility of another signification to his words than that she wanted. This son-in-law of hers puzzled the good lady sometimes, by the very inability of a crooked nature to comprehend a straightforward one.

"Shall it be a secret, then?" she asked in a winning way.

"What?"

"The new dress that I order. Better say nothing till it arrives, and it will be a very pretty little surprise for her. I promise you that it shall be tasteful and lady-like, just what Agnes herself

would select. But as to the quixotic idea of presenting herself in that black silk which she has for best dress, I think it would positively be little short of an insult to Lady R——'s invitation, if she appears in no better garb. Everybody knows that she has had it several months."

His silence led her to speak more strongly than in judicious dealing with him she ought to have done. But if ever, gentle reader, you want to draw on a woman to say more than is expedient for herself, just hold your own peace, and look calm. Ten to one she reveals a secret, or lays bare her feelings in some way, before that stimulating silence.

"What a fatal objection!" he said credulously. "I hope Lady R—— does not keep account of the age of my coats."

"I can never get you to be serious, Richard," said Mrs. Ferrol, disguising some slight irritation. "But as I don't wish to interrupt your letters any longer, just tell me, have I your sanction to write for Agnes's dress?"

"Agnes, what do you say?" He turned to his wife, who an instant previously had entered. "I fear you will discredit me at Lady R——'s, without a milliner's order on your person. Shall we write to London, dear, for the additional respectability of a new gown?"

She smiled the soft smile that he loved so well. What a world of mutual trust was there! Poor Agatha, looking and listening from the window-seat where she was netting, had a heartache to contrast this glimpse with certain memories of her own.

Mrs. Ferrol's scheme came to nought; for Agnes was sensible and gently firm, and her husband had the fullest confidence in her judgment. The elder lady covered her defeat with a series of Parthian shafts, flung as she quitted the field, her forces in good order—to the effect that she would be the last person to recommend, or, indeed, to countenance, needless extravagance; but she

must say that there were occasions on which a proper regard to the opinions of others was absolutely necessary. That, if some people had not kept up apearances, at great labour and risk to themselves, certain other people would not be in the position they occupied at present; for instance, Mildred could never have gained the wealthy match she did. That a seclusion from the world rendered persons eccentric in their habits and ideas, and incapable of judging of the proprieties required in good society; with a variety of other asseverations bearing on the topic in hand. Which ended, Mr. Wardour betook himself again to his writing, tranquilly, undisturbed by the knowledge that his wife's mother thought him more odd than ever.

The eventful day arrived; they went to R—— Manor in the little pony phaeton, Langholm's solitary vehicle of upper rank. Mrs. Ferrol was the only one who felt a pang that it was not a handsome carriage, blazoned with armorial bearings; perhaps she was even ashamed of it among the line of equipages, for she was in some haste to leave it. The afternoon looked showery, and fulfilled its promise by dispersing the archery meeting with heavy rain, before a single prize had been adjudged. Then the guests sat in the long grand reception-rooms, looking at each other and at the weather, and conversing, in suppressed tones, chiefly on the latter subject, until a break in the leaden skies caused the noble hostess to suggest the gardens and conservatories.

Lady R—— possessed the golden art of conferring enjoyment on those with whom she conversed. The exquisite repose of manner which lay about her like moonlight, was soothing as soft music: it was in her tones, her quiet gestures, her calm decision of thought. The incommunicable charm enveloped Agnes with a pleased spell, and her turns of conversation with Lady R—— formed the oasis in her Sahara of a day. She had no enjoyment in the interminably tedious dinner, with a band playing among

marble columns at the end of the room; sideboards laden with gold and silver plate, flashing back innumerable lights; tall liveried lackeys ministering endless courses of meats and drinks; while conversation trickled slowly along among the company. Most of the latter were conscious of an indefinable relief when it was all over. But the R—— Chronicle of next date termed it "a *recherché* entertainment, unsurpassed by anything in the annals of our county;" also recording that the guests broke up at midnight, delighted with the hospitality of their noble host, and having enjoyed with the keenest zest such a day as comes not twice in a man's sublunary existence. It is needless, after this, to mention that the editor was among those honoured with an invitation, and had been specially signalized by ten minutes' conversation with Lord R—— himself.

Again home in the little pony phaeton. Oh, never did the clustering trees and low roof of Langholm seem so dear to its mistress as now, under the white light of a midnight moon, in contrast to the splendour she had just left. When her mother and Agatha had gone to remove their wrappings, she went out into the porch, where meek closed rosebuds bowed their heads under heavy dews, and stood looking upon the glory of the heavens and the peace of the earth. Her heart was full of thankfulness to that Divine Providence which had cast her lot in quiet places; the moonbeams glittered upon tears in her upraised eyes.

"Agnes, are you tired?" Her husband put his arm round her as a support.

"A little," she replied. "Not so much as before I came home. O Richard, I am so glad that we have no style or stateliness, but can live for each other!"

"And for God," he added. "That will crown our lives with joy. I also am glad and grateful."

After a pause, he said:—

"Let it be our rule to please God in all things, and not our fellow-men, and to this end be thoroughly truthful in word and deed. Let us continue to eschew pretension, as sinful in His sight, 'who has appointed the bounds of our habitation.' It is not hard to be poor, when we remember that it is his will."

Thus they lived at Langholm; not for the hollow praise or censure of the babbling world, but for their mutual happiness in the performance of duty. A lowly life, compared with others; few glimpses of rank or of pomp interwoven with its days; yet surcharged with a love and peace to which even its very cares ministered.

Agatha gained health week by week in the pure Shropshire air, wafted from Welsh mountains. At last she would stay no longer; and Hugh took three holidays from the urgencies of his metropolitan business, (certainly Dr. Ferrol's practice was extending.) and came down to fetch her home.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. FERROL'S ACQUAINTANCES.

The quiet of Langholm was soothing to Hugh's jaded spirit, as it had been to his wife's. He was pleased to see her looking brighter and better than for months past; her pale cheek was lit with some slight colour again, and her eyes had a healthy vivacity, which rendered her natural fragility of appearance less observable. How she watched his face, to know whether all went well with him! Not much to satisfy her could be read in the disquiet of his eyes, and the sharpening of his features. The subject of their pecuniary difficulties was one which always annoyed him so much that she

cared to ask no direct questions; her timid and loving nature could not brave an unpleasant word from him; and he had a notion that it was best to leave her in ignorance of everything disagreeable. Some, at least, of his cares should be unshared by her: she was not able to bear them, Rather would she have borne all, and retained his confidence.

The simplicity of this household he rather contemned, as did his mother; while secretly he envied its security.

"You have a pretty place here, Wardour," he said, as they walked over the stubble-ground one morning, towards the fifty-acre field, where reapers were at work loading the harvest wains. "The view is good, and the air must be very healthful. Can't say I should relish a country life myself; but for those that do, nobody could wish a snugger nest than this."

"It *is* pretty," was the reply as the owner looked up across the sloping meadows towards tranquil Langholm, sleeping in the September sunlight; its clothing of virgin's bower leaves was already dyed in flakes of crimson and gold colour: a copper beech nearest among the trees waved shining bronze foliage far above the low chimneys. He continued to gaze for a minute or so, with a satisfied expression on his countenance. "It is associated with a great many memories, for my father's younger brother lived here, and I spent my holidays with him as a boy; but somehow I never contemplated making it my own home, till that lawsuit went against us; and then, my poor father's death leaving his affairs very complicated, almost the only property of which I am sure is this Langholm farm."

The late Squire Wardour had in his time hunted the county with a pack of beagles, which animals, and their appendages of a stud and keepers, had eaten up the major part of his estate. Langholm was a remnant of his wife's portion, settled upon her son. At present all else was in the meshes of the Equity Courts,

which were likely to devour the oyster, and hand the shells obligingly to the parties concerned.

"It is well to be sure of anything," said Hugh, with a laugh which had little mirth. "Now, we poor wretches of professional people are compelled to keep up an astonishing appearance upon nothing at all. Fortunate for you country people that you can live as you like; for I assure you it is a most disagreeable necessity to be obliged to consult the opinions of the world at every point."

"I have no doubt that it is," was the laconic answer. And presently Mr. Wardour added in soliloquy the words of Bunyan, "He that is low needs fear no fall."

They had reached the workmen; and Dr. Ferrol looked on while the master went about overseeing, and giving various directions. Afterwards they walked round the farm, stopping in pastures to inspect young stock, and in plantations to look at young trees, and at some cottages where Mr. Wardour had business, or a poor sick person wished to see the physician; which so much extended their excursion, that afternoon had arrived when they found themselves near the house again.

"There is Mrs. Cardamom's carriage," said Mr. Wardour, with reference to a flashy equipage drawn up at the little gate.

"What dreadful colouring!" exclaimed the doctor, beholding bright beetroot-tinted panels, purple hammercloth, and blue and yellow liveries. "Who is Mrs. Cardamom?"

He was introduced in the drawing-room to a portly and comely dame, gifted with a decidedly cockney accent, and dressed richly in colours to match her carriage; likewise was there a brace of daughters of similar aspect. Mrs. Ferrol the elder was exceedingly polite, though somewhat patronizing; she never forgot for an instant that the florid lady beside her on the sofa was the wife of a grocer retired from business, and despised her accordingly, though

one year's income of the same Mr. Figbury Cardamom would have made the poor officer's widow comfortable for life. It was solely in consideration of the wealth that Mrs. Ferrol disregarded the tea in their escutcheon, and was friendly, nay, almost intimate, in her inquiries and remarks; until in a moment all was changed.

A fresh rumbling of wheels was heard—a light springy carriage bowling along, as behind the action of hundred-guinea thoroughbreds. Mrs. Ferrol's heart grew chill; she had noted the sound too frequently not to recognise that it proceeded from Lady R——'s barouche. Dark, unpretending in adornment, faultlessly neat and tasteful, it supplanted the Cardamom equipage.

"What a horrid *contretemps!*" was her internal reflection; her son saw it plainly as if spoken. "Lady R—— and Lady Edith to find these people here!"

But it was inevitable; and nothing could be done except to treat Mrs. Cardamom for the rest of her visit with distant civility, in order to convey the impression to Lady R—— that the retired tradesman's wife was merely tolerated as a necessary evil; whereas the truth is, that a carriage on any terms being preferable to none at all, Mrs. Ferrol had vouchsafed to take sundry drives with this identical Mrs. Cardamom, charming her by her "distingay" demeanour, and by the familiarity with which she introduced titled names into her conversation; till the dazzled woman almost suspected that Mrs. F. was herself a peeress in disguise. But of course her acceptance of such attentions as these by no means entitled Mrs. Cardamom to notice under present circumstances.

Hugh was amused with his mother's manœuvres. First, she skilfully withdrew herself from the contaminating neighbourhood, ostensibly to make room for the new visitors, who indeed completed the filling of the Langholm little drawing-room to the bound of its capacity. And then she addressed herself almost exclusively to the countess, whose quick quiet eyes took in the

whole scene at a glance, and thought no better of the plausible widow for it.

And Mrs. Cardamom was bewildered at the change in the cordial Mrs. Ferrol's manners, as well as at the grand company in which she unexpectedly found herself, and, by way of appearing at her ease, and perfectly accustomed to that or any other society, talked much and loudly to Agnes; while her *h's* became more slippery than ever, and her face glowed and shone from internal combustion—a contrast to Mrs. Ferrol's, which waxed momentally paler with mortification and intensity of desire to quench the unconscious woman in some way. Through all her efforts to absorb Lady R——'s attention, she knew well that not a tone nor accent of Mrs. Cardamom's was lost upon that well-bred ear. Meanwhile, the Misses Cardamom sat still, and stared at the attire of Lady Edith with all the might of their memories, and could subsequently detail every article, from the little bonnet to the little boots, with all the several peculiarities of make, texture, and trimming; ending invariably with the remark—"Well, now, wouldn't one think that an earl's daughter would be handsomer dressed?"

At last the carriage, with variegated macaws of footmen behind, drove away, and Mrs. Ferrol breathed more freely; mentioned Mrs. C—— as a slight visiting acquaintance, and an excellent woman, signifying immeasurable inferiority by the commendation. But when Lady R—— had likewise departed, her compressed irritation found vent.

"She will imagine that we are on terms of the closest intimacy with that odious woman. The idea of telling her family affairs, about Sarah Maria and Clarence George—what vilely vulgar names!—their schooling and board, and when they had the measles—and then about her servants and their wages; oh, Agnes, it was more than any one could bear! I am sure Lady R—— was

surprised to find her here. I'll cut her; I'll never drive in that detestable beetroot carriage again!"

"I would advise you not, madam," said her son-in-law, gravely.

"I don't know how we came to have such acquaintances. It is quite enough to prevent Lady R—— from coming here again."

"Which would be a dreadful misfortune," observed Mr. Wardour, "if *that* could prevent her."

Agatha was to go away the next morning. Agnes and she went out to take leave of the garden, when sunset rays were striking through the westward trees, slant upon the flower-beds; lighting up the crimson cardinal plant with a more gorgeous flame, gleaming tenderly upon the delicate autumnal crocus, and glorifying a range of many coloured dahlias—these last Mr. Wardour's care and delight as a florist. His wife was cutting a bouquet which should travel to London to-morrow, and serve as a reminiscence of sweet Langholm.

The shadow of the old heavy life was drawing again in gloom over Agatha's heart. Now that she was returning to it, she felt what had been the relief of absence, and what the magnitude of the burden thus temporarily withdrawn. The only lightening point was her husband's love; and when she realized that, wife-like, she could bear any toil or care.

"Our London life is so different from this," Agatha had said, turning a carnation in her fingers; "all bustle and excitement, and striving to be foremost. I have felt, once or twiee, like a person in a crowd, who will be trampled underfoot if he falters in pushing forward. It is sad to be poor in London, at least in our circle: if one dare be openly poor, I should not care; but one must keep up an appearance to secure the good opinion of society; and then the struggle is hard—very hard—." She blushed slightly at the implied confession.

"Well," said Agnes, "before we were married, I frequently

wondered how we could live upon Richard's small income. Perhaps my ideas had been unduly enlarged by thinking of Mildred's wealth. But one day he made a remark which put the matter in quite a new light; I have hardly ever regretted our narrow circumstances since."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me whether I did not remember that his small income was the will of God, and that the highest philosophy is to have learned contentment with one's lot. Dear Agatha, the belief in God's love and wisdom would make any poverty easy to be borne, when it is clearly his will."

"When we came to live at Langholm," she said afterwards, "we made a resolution to be perfectly truthful in our life, as well in actions as words, and have no pretension whatever. You see that we have few visitors——"

The conversation was cut short by Hugh's voice resounding through the garden, calling them. But during their parting embrace next morning, Agatha found time to whisper, "I will remember what you said—I will endeavour to be satisfied;" so her wistful eyes looked their last of peaceful Langholm.

Mr. Wardour drove them to the nearest railway station; he had intrusted his brother-in-law with the execution of some trifling business in town, and they talked about it and cognate subjects incessantly. Agatha caught the general idea that it was some banking affair at Rupee and Ferrol's, and, having no taste for details of the kind, she drew close the curtains of her thoughts, and sat in their sombre shade.

"Wardour is a capital fellow, if he wasn't so much of a methodist," her husband said, when they were seated in the train. "Peculiar notions he has—it's a pity."

They were received at Euston Square terminus by the magnificence of Marks and the carriage. Again was Agatha afloat upon the pretentious false life of appearances.

Mrs. Ferrol did not long continue at Langholm after their departure. She craved company and excitement; nay, even the shifts and subterfuges of her former experience seemed preferable to the quiet about her here. Excluded from London by the few bills she owed to various parties, she cast her eyes across the channel to Dublin, where resided her maiden sisters, Honoria and Bidelia Loftus. She would for a season cast in her lot with them.

To the full as much imbued with the spirit of "keeping up appearances" as was Mrs. Ferrol's self, these old ladies had no other aim of existence. They resided in the family mansion, in what had once been the best part of the Irish capital; were constant at the viceregal drawing-rooms and balls; and dressed so well that the items were deemed worthy of record in the columns devoted to the Castle fashionables by the public prints. How they accomplished all this was a marvel which puzzled their brother, Sir Hugh, who paid half-yearly the interest of their small charges on his estate. It could only be by very tight management—so tight that they had small dealings with the butcher; and then the fine old gray-headed servant (a very patent of respectability lay in his mien and manner), who announced their numerous visitors, cost nothing but his meals: he and his ancestors had been retainers of the Loftus family for generations, so that he regarded its interests as identical with his own, and scorned to qualify his connection by the sordid motive of wages. Nay, he was proud to help in upholding the "ould stock" at a personal sacrifice.

Thus, by living continually in a haze of petty debts, diversified with one or two dangerously large ones, and by enduring many of the discomforts and privations attendant upon the most rigid poverty, the Misses Honoria and Bidelia Loftus gained their great end of court dresses for a few nights annually. In such congenial atmosphere did Mrs. Ferrol spend several months of the ensuing winter.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FORESHADOW OF A CRIME.

AGATHA's baby was born in January—a poor, puny little daughter, white and fragile as a snow-flake, but the loveliest being that ever her mother's eyes had seen. Hugh did not appear to care particularly about her; he was absent and engrossed in manner generally, and Agatha's heart closed with double force about her child.

Now came the additional expenses of nursery and attendant for the little one. Dearly would the mother have wished to be its sole care-taker; but the stern law of appearances required a stylish nurse, and magnificent attire for baby, lest Mrs. Glanvil, or Mrs. anybody else, might infer poverty from the omission, or perchance utter the stinging sentence, "How very extraordinary!" So an imposing-looking woman, whom Agatha instinctively dreaded, was installed in office, at high wages, by Mrs. Carnaby Pyke.

And the other grandmother, Mrs. Ferrol, moved by similar motives, sent the infant a handsome silver goblet, bearing her name and crest; likewise a gift to the nurse: after which munificence, nobody could doubt that she was a lady in wealthy circumstances, and likely to leave a baby a fortune, perhaps.

Meanwhile, as the new arrival was fêted and caressed to excess by the womankind, as if she were some very peculiar novelty in the world; propitiated with offerings from friends; exhibited by that priestess nurse—commonly in a state of Hindoo absorption and disregard of her votaries; the clouds were thickening about her father, and matters grew worse in the spring time. The habitual living beyond his income had heaped up a frightful aggregate of debt. He now began to fear arrest, or the putting of an execution into his house. No vague hints had been dropped by more than

one of his creditors. His wealthy brother-in-law, Euston Ferrol, had lent him some money, which smoothed matters for a while; but the loan was accompanied by an intimation that no further aid need be sought from him. Hugh's income from the hospital had been largely forestalled, and that from his practice was necessarily precarious. It is not too much to say that at times he felt desperate, and was a thoroughly miserable man.

He was coming home one evening, and turned into a clothier's shop in a neighbouring street: a child was ailing. Having prescribed, he sat in the little back parlour, talking to the father for a few minutes. Going through the house, he had been struck with the poverty of the arrangements, and utter deficiency of comfort, contrasted with the flashy establishment below, which seemed to guarantee a thriving business to its owner. Mr. Bodkin was an old acquaintance of Doctor Ferrol's; he had been dealing with him since first he came to London as a student; and, strange to say, when a penniless pupil at an hospital, his payments had been considerably more prompt and regular than since he had set up a carriage. Still was the tailor encouraged to give credit by the very fact of said carriage.

But poor Mr. Bodkin had been giving credit too extensively. His books contained piles of unpaid accounts, set against names most honourable; and the enforcing payment was often beyond his power. Among others favouring him with their patronage (on "tick") were the Messrs. Glanvil, sons to a vulpine lady before mentioned. It was necessary that these young gentlemen should be handsomely dressed, in order "to keep up appearances;" but by no means equally necessary that they should pay for their garments. That was a private, not to say vulgar, transaction, whence no public honour could accrue; for who was to know of default, except the victimized clothier?

And being particularly troubled this afternoon, by receipt of a

bank missive purporting that no further advances could be made on his account till adequate effects were lodged—which, placed as an offset to several large outstanding bills with Yorkshire manufacturers, caused rather an alarming mental *coup d'œil*—Mr. Bodkin could not keep his bitterness of heart to himself. Some trifling inquiry of Doctor Ferrol's as to how times went with him, caused the poor fellow to shake his head sadly.

"Just as bad as can be, sir. The business is falling all to pieces, for I can't get paid nohow; and then, how can I be expected to meet my calls? I'll be bankrupt if it goes on much longer, with good debts enough on my books to give me a fair profit."

Hugh rather winced, for his name was certainly in the books referred to; but the other, who had turned his back suddenly, that the gentleman might not perceive real tears forcing into his poor old eyes, said: "It's not on account of any trifle you owe me, Doctor Ferrol, that I say this: for you can pay me with medical advice, as you are doing now. But I shall have to shut up, sir, after so many years struggling."

His voice grew husky. Of what matter was his honest grief? Why should he not have tears wrung from his very heart—only a tailor's—provided that Messrs. Glanvil and other such honourable men can wear his cloth and take the labour of his hands, "to keep up appearances!"

"I am sorry," Doctor Ferrol said truthfully—"I am very sorry to hear this."

Little did Mr. Bodkin guess how nearly alike was their position, and what writhings of conscience his recital had called up.. Hugh went to his desk as soon as he got home, and taking one of its very few bank-notes, inclosed it to the clothier in part payment of his account, and astonished the majestic Marks by commanding him to deliver the letter at once, duly waiting for an answer.

Agatha was as usual in the nursery, where baby lay awake in her cot, one tiny pink hand clasped round her mother's finger; which feat was hailed by mamma and nurse as a prodigy. But papa's dark face frightened his little daughter; she turned away her head and cried, which pleased him not. The mother's sympathies tried to harmonize both parties, and scarcely succeeded. A mere trifle would now seriously discompose the once light-hearted Hugh.

But she had never seen him so discomposed; she had not thought he could be so ill-tempered, as when, later in the evening, she ventured to ask him for money—wages owing to the nurse—he accused her of systematically tormenting him, of caring more for that wretched infant than ever she had cared for him. What other querulous things he said in the unreasonableness of his anger shall not be recorded. His wife was resentful for a moment at his injustice, but soon the tears of wounded affection began to flow. He would not look at her, or he must have hated himself for his violent words. Agatha went away to that solace of many a heart-stricken wife, the child's cradle, and, as she passed up the stairs, heard the hall-door slam loudly after her husband. The first unkind parting! what a sad epoch to a loving heart!

While he was absent, the latest postal delivery brought two letters addressed to him; one Agatha knew to be in Richard Wardour's writing—the other unknown. Both were lying on his study table when he returned, indicated by Marks with the words, "Letters, Sir."

He had generally some apprehension of what the post might bring, and eyed the unknown letter suspiciously as he drew off his boots. Wardour's was of little consequence; still he dallied over the few lines, for it retarded the opening of the other blue envelope, which he was certain contained unpleasing news. Has not a letter a physiognomy? This was ill-favoured—baleful.

At last he opened it deliberately with a penknife, trying to leave the wafer uninjured—as if that were of any consequence. At the foot of the page was the signature of the house-agent; and the one paragraph, which his eyes gathered the meaning of rather than read, demanded an arrear of rent long due, and threatened a distraint upon the premises.

He flung down the sheet angrily, with a suppressed exclamation of rage and dismay. For some minutes he could not think clearly; a mist thickened before his eyes—his brain was dizzy. An execution in his house! What could be more dreadful? His prospects in life would be ruined; all the other creditors would swoop down upon his fallen fortunes; what would become of him? And his poor wife! He sat moodily gazing into the fire for a long time; the lines on his face deepening and hardening, a frown fixing upon his brows, desolation in his heart.

Not two years started on the arena of life, and already run to the wall—already his ambitious dreams evaporated, his high hopes dashed with the direst discomfiture? Oh, saddest termination of youth's strivings! To this miserable exposure had come the falsity and pretension of his life. He ran over his friends mentally, and could perceive no help. Sir Lancett Pyke was the closest miser breathing. Euston Ferrol had once aided and once warned him, and he knew would do so no more. His father-in-law could hardly meet his own liabilities. Richard Wardour was too poor; besides, there would not be time to write to him, and it was totally unlikely that he had a hundred pounds to spare.

Still Hugh, with a lingering hope, turned to the table and took up his short friendly note. There would at least be no unwillingness, if he had the power to serve him, which was doubtful. But the sinking man clutched at even this straw. He wrote a hurried letter imploring the loan of fifty pounds, and faithfully promising repayment within a given period. Hugh had become very facile

at such promises. He would go to the nearest receiver himself and post the letter, that it might be on its way that night. And yet, three days must elapse before an answer could arrive. He hesitated. His eyes fell upon Mr. Wardour's signature; and at that instant a dark thought entered his heart. Mr. Wardour was engaged in a law suit, which rendered the raising of ready money at times indispensable. How plausible was the scheme! "And then," further whispered the temptation, "he need never know of it. The bill can be taken up before it falls due; nobody will be injured, and you will be saved."

He did not resolutely put away the proffered crime, but permitted it to be acted over in his thoughts. He felt in a fever. What! commit forgery? This ugly name decided him for some half hour; but with contemplation of the iron difficulty returned also the evil way of escape, and the soothing persuasion that perfect secresy might be insured, and no harm done. Here was the bait.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE SHADOW.

VERY late in the night the handle of the study door was softly turned—so softly that Doctor Ferrol, deeply engrossed in his occupation, bending over a desk, writing slowly and carefully, did not hear the slight sound. The letters which had come by the last post lay open before him. His wife touched his shoulder ere he perceived her; he started, and hastily crushed up the paper under his hand.

"Hugh dear," she said, "we did not part pleasantly this evening; I beg your pardon."

She might have been a ghost, so white and wan she looked;

tears brimming her large eyes, full also of a mournful and passionate tenderness. "Oh, Hugh," she exclaimed, sinking on the ground before him, laying her meek head on his knees humbly, "I have been very miserable!"

He threw that paper into the fire, and raised her in his arms and soothed her. "My poor Agatha," he called her. No sympathy in words did he express; but she understood the caress, and its meaning of remorseful regret, and his face hidden from her; for he knew he was unworthy to meet that look of confiding affection. And she pitied him, with a compassionate love which was almost pain.

"I should remember that you have so many things to trouble you, Hugh: I must learn to bear with a few cross words better, for I know you do not intend them to hurt me, dear. But I am not strong of late; very little makes me nervous and dispirited: you must forgive me, Hugh, and bear with me also, whenever I vex you."

And her poor little heart breathed a little suppressed sigh, like the checking of an involuntary sob. "Ah, Hugh," she said, with the same small sigh, "I never have nice long conversations with you now. You are always so busy and pre-occupied that I feel like an intruder; and I know you spare me the knowledge of things that fret you, dear: you ought to have had a clever wife, Hugh, that could manage everything without teasing you about it, and never be low-spirited, but always sensible and cheerful." Poor Agatha was much inclined to cry afresh at her own dissimilarity to this ideal; while her husband experienced rather a grateful sense of magnanimity, in overlooking these confessed deficiencies of hers, and in the consciousness that he really did spare her some of his anxieties.

But though not clever nor far-sighted, Agatha had a true perception of the cause of the blight that had come over their domestic happiness; she was one of those gentle beings who are

unable to cope with an evil, and can only helplessly suffer the results. Wistfully she looked at her husband now, while her fingers pushed back his clustering hair (very slender they seemed in the dark mass above his forehead), and she felt brave enough to break the silence that had grown between them on that matter.

"Hugh," she asked, "will you be angry with me if I say something that has been weighing on my mind—even if it is very foolish?"

"No," he promised.

She tried to smooth with her hand a slight frown that had gathered between his brows. "For you know you did not marry a clever woman, Hugh, but only one that loves you!" His moodiness did not permit him to look pleased even at this tender little speech, which her simple heart thought would be very telling. "It is something about the way we are living, dear." She felt the contraction deepen, and hid her face on his shoulder, that she might not see his darkening expression.

"We are struggling too much; we are trying to do what is impossible, I am afraid. The anxiety is too heavy for you, Hugh; and for me——"

The once all-powerful argument she was content to indicate thus: she could have told of failing strength and ebbing spirits; but her unselfishness thought little of these.

"If we could live in a small house somewhere, and had no carriage, nor any servants but just what we really wanted, oh, Hugh, we could be so happy! We need not care what anybody said of us——"

"And I could dig the garden, and cultivate radishes and cress, which would doubtless be very remunerative labour," he interposed, sarcastically. "You know it is impossible for a man in my position to realise any such fool's paradise." He stirred the fire sharply with his disengaged hand.

"Somebody promised he would not be angry," pleaded his wife.

"Nor am I angry. But it is late to think of all this; we must go on as we have begun. Don't let yourself get into gloomy habits of anticipation, Agatha. I can look forward to the time when we shall be able to smile at our old embarrassments—when baby is a tall girl, and I have worked myself to the top of the wheel——"

He seemed no cheerful prophet, with a pale quivering face, that belied his vaticinations; he stood up to end the distasteful conference.

"There is no cause for your misgivings," he added, desirous to keep up the falsity of appearances even to her. But it is harder to deceive the quick eye of affection than a whole bench of lawyers; she tried to quell her apprehensions by an implicit credence—the effort failed.

"Don't you see how I have made way already?" he said hurriedly. "Sir Lancett says that he has seldom known a young practitioner to secure such good footing in the profession within a period comparatively very short. Mrs. Portland Plaice sent for me to-day, the family attendant being himself ill. An introduction in that quarter is worth a considerable income. Calm yourself, my little wife; my circumstances are not so desperate as you seem to imagine."

A white gleam on the crimson carpet beside her attracted her attention; she stooped for the sheet of paper which had fallen from his desk, and retained it in her hand as she answered: "I am very glad you told me, Hugh. I suppose it is because I do not understand business that I am apprehensive sometimes. Then it would comfort me to speak to you, for you are so much wiser and cleverer than I. May I speak to you, and tell you all my thoughts, whenever I am nervous about anything?"

"Of course," he said. "But endeavour to cultivate sensible and cheerful views of things."

"Ah, Hugh," she said, "you must wait till you have the other wife, after me—the clever woman who will be with you when you are a great man—by-and-by; and who will never tease or affront you, but know exactly what to say to you, and how to make you happy."

"Nonsense!" he said; "I hate clever women"—a circumstance true of most mediocrities among the stronger sex.

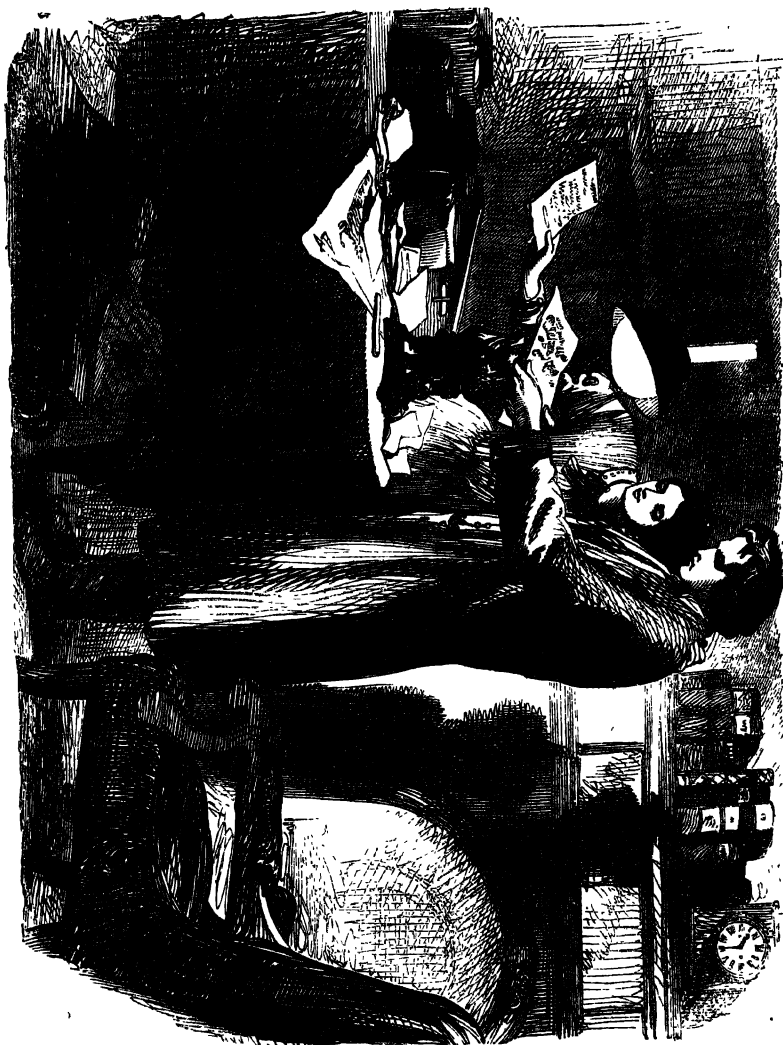
A few minutes afterwards Agatha exclaimed, her eyes having fallen on the paper in her hand—

"How curious! how very like! what an odd amusement! Why, Hugh, you have copied Richard Wardour's signature so exactly that I could never know it apart from the real!"

He drew the sheet from her fingers, as if to admire the similarity himself, and looked at it under the lamp. Had she been less engrossed with the incident, she must have observed his altered face, and the hand which not all his efforts could keep perfectly still. But she was standing beside him, holding Mr. Wardour's letter for comparison, and smiling at the extraordinary resemblance of the autographs.

"That peculiar curl of the capital R, and the stroke fastening the two names together—I never saw anything more like! I shall be afraid of your committing forgery some day," she said, clinging to his arm.

"It is an old school talent of mine—if talent it may be called," he remarked, none the ruddier for her last words. "I could copy any fellow's writing all through the classes. Bump of imitation large, I suppose." He turned carelessly to the fire, and dropped the paper into the blaze. They watched it curl up and blacken into a film, still retaining the characters on its surface: he made an end of it with the poker, folded up his letters and locked his desk.

The foreshadow haunted him even in dreams. Every stroke of

"WHY, HUGH, THIS IS RICHARD WARDOUR'S SIGNATURE!"

that name bristled into living serpents, writhing from off the paper into his face; and when he hastened away, they pursued him through his house, through endless streets, through lanes and courts of a dark city, till he was driven up into a place whence there was no egress, no help; and the loathsome reptiles reached him, twined round him, their hisses in his ears, their fangs in his flesh: he awoke, shuddering violently. What a foolish dream! How childish to tremble superstitiously at the incongruous imaginations of sleep! Did he not well understand the theory of dreaming, and could explain minutely its philosophy? He could trace the origin of this, easily. Quite natural that his brain should work still at the leading idea of his last waking hours; but as to a threat or warning involved—pooh! he left such blind beliefs to the credulous and ignorant.

He composed himself again to sleep. But there are times when the restfulness of losing one's identity in the balmy Lethe of slumber seems a mystery utterly unknown—when one even wonders to remember the countless nights that the mind has at once succumbed to its grateful anodyne. Every faculty is triply wakeful; memory presents pictures almost tangible; anticipation gives a life-like rehearsal of future actions. Dr. Ferrol's brain would not be still; he could not darken its chambers, nor exclude its trooping imagery. That name was yet the master-key. The scenes of the possible crime were acted over before him—the precautions against discovery, the chances of detection. What a diabolical logic incited him to the deed! all advantage to be gained by it—nothing to be lost, little to be risked. How was the moral evil veiled with a cloak of sophistry, and his fear of danger counterbalanced by exaggerated views of the impending ruin! The mustard grain of temptation had expanded to a mighty upas tree, shadowing his whole inner world.

And if he yielded to the temptation, who can wonder? Had

not his education been without principle, and its chief social training the maintenance of a living falsehood? His mother had paved the way for this fall, when she laid in the child's mind the groundwork of expediency; his father had helped towards it when he set the example of "keeping up appearances" at all hazards.

The banking house of Rupee, Ferrol, and Co. was situate in one of the great business centres of the city; whence, as from ganglionic knots of nerves, thrill the sensations of mercantile life through all the limbs of England. Towards it, among a variety of other equipages on this April day, drove the handsome chocolate britska of Mrs. Carnaby Pyke, containing not now herself, but her husband, as being the responsible party essential in monetary transactions. Old Mr. Grimston, the head clerk, no sooner looked over his spectacles at the swinging open of the great door, than he had an intuitive perception of the gentleman's business. To that experienced person, "renewal of bill" was written plainly upon the somewhat embarrassed gait and gestures, the almost shuffling look: he had seen them too often to be mistaken.

"Living beyond his means," thought the astute manager, as he bent his gray head again over his books; till a teller came up to know whether he should draw out a fresh bill, and take the interest due on the old one.

"Certainly." Mr. Grimston had had time to make up his mind: to the clerk his celerity of decision was marvellous, and he ventured to remark, "Third time, sir."

"We'll take care of ourselves," was the reply, with a sapient smile; and the junior went on his errand. Meanwhile, Mr. Carnaby Pyke fidgetted, and felt sadly humiliated by this tacit confession of pecuniary pressure; he signed hastily; and not till the softly swaying folding doors closed behind him did he resume the moneyed air which usually sat so well upon his ample figure.

Mr. Grimston raised his eyes again. Doctor Ferrol was entering,

and went quickly to the nearest teller's desk. "Brother-in-law's business he used to come on," thought the manager; and likewise determined that if he wanted any advances on his own account, they should not be given without the chief's special authority. Again the teller came for instructions, with a bill of exchange in his hand, purporting to be the acceptance of Richard Wardour. Mr. Grimston scrutinized it narrowly through his spectacles, sent the clerk on some trifling message, and while he was absent took a letter from a drawer in his secretary, marked W, and compared the signatures. He was unwilling that the teller should witness such an act of distrust, but it was Mr. Grimston's maxim to place confidence in none; he gave back the paper with the words, "All right; we have security."

And Doctor Ferrol, standing at the far end of the rows of desks—for he cared not to come nearer to the sharp-sighted Grimston—looked stedfastly at a notice hung from the upper rail before him. Did he see a single distinct word in the entire sheet? Would he have given the universe to recall that piece of paper stamped irrevocably with a crime, and burn it out of existence? What were they doing with it? The time seemed immensely long. He durst not glance towards the manager's office. Terror was in his heart, and upon his blanched countenance. He stood mechanically gazing at the printed notice, but no more reading a line of it than could a blind man.

The teller's voice startled him like thunder. "In notes or in gold, sir?"

"Half of each."

With success, he regained his presence of mind fully. A hundred pounds was paid over to him: how reviving was the touch of the unhallowed money! For a minute or two he visited the chief partner's office, where Euston Ferrol laboured hard as any of his subordinate clerks, and with a thousand times as anxious

care; and these brothers-in-law, having a concealment in each heart dark and ruinous, which neither would for his life have bared, contrived mutually to smile with prosperous air, suitable to their easy and unembarrassed lives.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SKELETON AT THE BANKER'S.

DAY after day did Euston Ferrol repair to his office in the city, and exercise the most unceasing vigilance over the concerns of the firm. He was a model for business men; no pleasure could tempt him away from the pursuit of his interest. His sleepless watchfulness seized every opportunity of aggrandizement for the house, and rarely was guilty of a profitless speculation. Mr. Grimston, who was suspicious, and of a ferret nature, could not but admire his spirit and success. Still, in the background remained that tremendous deficit: the utmost his ability could effect was to prevent its growing larger.

He had a distrust of Grimston, deep-rooted and intuitive; but for the old clerk's usefulness and experience, he would have got rid of him. Nothing tangible could he specify to his own apprehensions, as proving that Grimston was aware of the house's real position; still, he knew not how far his father might have permitted grounds for suspicion to be visible to his quick-witted subordinate. Mr. Ferrol, the chief partner, walked softly and warily as regarded Grimston, which the latter perceived, as he did most other things within his range; and, knowing that his superior had reasons for every tittle of his conduct, he easily found an adequate cause for this.

Gradually the old clerk lengthened his chain of proofs with

links of evidence drawn from occult sources, and strengthened the whole by a score of petty facts, which seemed of no significance until placed skilfully together. He was gratified to receive Mr. Euston Ferrol's courteous bow of a morning, as he passed through the files of desks to his own room, and to feel that he, even he, Grimston, was master of that gentleman's fate, in a manner. Hidden power was luxurious to his tastes, as stolen bread is sweet to another morbid turn of mind.

But, even for such gratification, he did not leave the power a day idle, when it was in a state fit to use effectively. He knew that the disclosure of his knowledge would be a declaration of perpetual enmity between the head of the house and himself; a premature disclosure, before sustained by irresistible proofs, would be worse than useless—it would be ruinous to his own prospects. Mr. Grimston could afford to wait, and week after week to gather his facts and corroborate his suspicions, till he had built up a consistent history of the fraud.

Then, on the very afternoon that Dr. Ferrol had been furnished with a hundred pounds on Mr. Wardour's acceptance, the wily old clerk was ready for action. Entering into Mr. Ferrol's private room with the usual abstract of the day's business, he seated himself for a few minutes' conversation. Chiefly upon the public news they talked, and floating rumours, such as never find their way into the journals, but, like thistle-down, can yet show what way the popular winds are blowing, and at times even become seeds of future things.

"The Bourse opened well this morning," said Mr. Ferrol, referring to a telegram lying on the table.

"Yes," said Mr. Grimston; "rentes at sixty-nine francs forty-five centimes—an advance of a fourth since yesterday, and still tending upwards. By the way, that was a strange business about Brockenthal. Brockenthal!" he repeated, rubbing his hand on

his lower lip as if perplexed; "that was the name, I fancy, of the Viennese banker whose frauds made such confusion in the mercantile world some time since. Was it Brockenthal?" he added, dubiously. "Nay, I believe not; but those German names are much alike, in my mind."

"That cannot be the name," said Mr. Ferrol, decisively. "The Baron Brockenthal is a distinguished diplomatist, and a Count of the empire."

"I may be mistaken as to the name," the other observed; "but the circumstances of the case were very remarkable—in fact, unparalleled in the annals of banking."

"Yes, yes; I believe I have heard something of it," quoth Euston Ferrol, with his eyes fixed on the French telegram in his hand. "Strange that securities should tend upwards while the aspect of affairs is so threatening."

"The curious point in Brockenthal's frauds," persevered Grimston, "was the long period of years during which they had been carried on, without the least suspicion on the part of the public. Perhaps I am wrong in calling him Brockenthal."

Had he noted, though his downcast eyes looked only at the bubbles of gas ejecting brilliancy from masses of coal, that momentary glance cast at him, forcible as a javelin—of apprehension, hate, vengeance?

"Another peculiarity was the daring nature of the swindle; all the bank deposits were used by him as private cash, regardless of the rights of the owners; but he continued to honour drafts regularly, and pay interest, long after he was thoroughly bankrupt. Just as if we, in this bank—suppose, for the sake of example, that you and I, Mr. Ferrol, being partners, were to dip our fingers in the purses of those who trust their fortunes to us, after having lost large sums by injudicious speculation——"

The humble head was lifted now, and the voice had somewhat

changed its customary obsequious modulation. Mr. Ferrol had risen, and stood with his back to the fire.

"I understand you, sir," he said sternly, his pallid face looking full at the manager. "I have expected this, though not quite prepared for its revelation in the form of an oriental apologue," he added, with a sneer. "And now, sir, since you can gain little by further publicity, I must trouble you to name your price, if you please."

Grimston had not calculated on this turn to the conference, and for the moment hesitated.

"You have not yet decided, perhaps, on the particular sum which your forbearance may be worth? I will give you till the morning to make up your mind; you can inform me by letter—good evening, Mr. Grimston." And he bowed him out.

His cab and high-stepping horse being at the door, Mr. Ferrol immediately took his departure, bowing with much suavity to the clerks and their manager, as had been his father's habit. Grimston conceived a certain respect for the young partner. "Cool hand and cool head," he thought; "if any one ever got through such a business as this, he will."

Yet, without doubt the old clerk was somewhat baffled. The pleasure he had promised himself in the gradual unfolding of details, and winding round Euston Ferrol's mind with a convincing chain of evidence, was dissipated. The long interview he had prepared for was cut unsatisfactorily short; he was sorry he had not given the hint months ago: since a hint apparently would have sufficed to insure an increase to his salary. Moved by remorse for a neglected opportunity, his conduct in the evening was so aggravating to Mrs. Grimston, (though a long-suffering female trained to endurance by half a life-time of it,) that she averred she never had seen Mr. G. so cut up; she only hoped he had not got his dismissal from Ferrol's, that's all. No, Mrs.

Grimston; he is merely revenging upon you, who cannot retaliate, the rebuff he experienced in that private office from his chief. He has been in the habit of doing it, Mrs. Grimston—dove tailing official life into domestic, by a transference to the latter of the ill-humour which must be repressed in the former. The intimate acquaintances of the family think him a gentleman of most delightful manners; his deference to Mrs. G. is especially charming, say the ladies: and thus hath Grimston, as well as his chief, one life for public audience, and another, widely different, behind the scenes.

Mr. Grimston had another cause, perchance, for his ill temper on this evening. Looking closely into the matter, he had slightly a sensation of being outwitted, which was galling. He was very unwilling to write a letter on the subject of his interview with Mr. Ferrol, or to put his demand into plain language. Though knowing nothing of law, he had all a professional man's caution concerning written words. In the event of anything happening, (which "anything" meant public exposure and disgrace,) he wished to appear an innocent sufferer, if possible. He wanted the wages of an accomplice without the risk.

But Euston Ferrol was determined that thus it should not be. When, on the ensuing morning, he found among his daily pile of letters the expected note, cautiously worded, and merely initialled as signature, he laid it aside till all the others were disposed of, and then sent for the manager.

"Take your note, Mr. Grimston; it is so ambiguously expressed as to be hardly intelligible. Pray state clearly, in your next application, on what grounds you claim increase of salary—specifying the *real* cause, remember, and sign it with your usual autograph. Only on these conditions will it receive favourable consideration from me."

"I think you may forget, Mr. Ferrol, that the real causes will not bear the light," said Grimston, stiffly.

"You have not stated them," was the cold reply.

"In the conversation with which you honoured me last evening——" began the clerk.

"I will hear nothing on the subject except in writing," interrupted Mr. Ferrol. "I do not want details; though, permit me to tell you, Mr. Grimston, that suspicion is not proof; but I wish to have your demand in a business-like form, alleging the services rendered for the money required. You can draw it up at your leisure, as perhaps you would like to have a lawyer's help in the choice of phrases calculated not to commit you, in case the transaction ever comes to light. Generally, when a man puts up his honesty to sale, he does not drive a separate bargain for his safety; but you are very prudent, Mr. Grimston."

The gentleman's lips were at home most in a sneer; his face was not comfortable to look at just now.

"And," he added—the bald patch upon Grimston's bent head glistening where another less mean man's eyes would have glowed—"I am sure you will write what I request, and secure to yourself a permanent increase of three hundred per annum. Whatever evidence you imagine you have collected can only amount to inferences and trivial occurrences, quite insufficient to support any statement with unprejudiced people."

Mr. Grimston, after another effort to obtain hearing, glided away with his customary feline motion on the toes, and had more rumination, and less weasel-like watching, that day than usual. Mr. Ferrol, left alone in his private room, leaned back in the crimson arm-chair, to think over his play in the late game; and a series of his unmirthful and malevolent smiles rested upon the row of exquisite filbert nails which he contemplated during his meditation.

"The old sharper imagined I was such a flat as to let him share in the profit and shirk the danger," quoth he to himself, somewhere

behind those white gleaming teeth. "But we must be in the same box, most cautious Grimston."

Still, the occurrence made him more seriously uneasy than anything that had yet happened with reference to the secret of the house. Therefore, he sought to bind Grimston by the double chain of interest and of complicity. The worthy clerk, after some additional shuffling, closed with his employer's terms. He would have vastly preferred a sum paid down, and then taking himself away from the whole concern, but he saw that an increase of salary was all that he could obtain for his silence. Mr. Ferrol placed the required paper in the same hidden drawer of a cabinet which contained the private accounts of the firm—that little compartment where lay the skeleton of the banker's house.

CHAPTER XIX.

AMONG OBSCURE PEOPLE.

Mr. Grimston's writing of the important note aforesaid, though not committed without mature deliberation, had yet the most disastrous effect on his home temper. As previously intimated, all that went wrong with him in the office was certain to have a reaction in his domestic circle—if we can call that a circle which was composed solely of the diminutive Mrs. G. and a pet Scotch terrier, whose snappish temperament endeared him to his master.

Alighting from the crowded omnibus at the usual little green gate, fifth in a series of twenty-four, leading to the twenty-four green hall doors entitled Primrose Terrace,) Mr. Grimston gave first evidence of his disposition by the manner in which he kicked off his boots in the little hall; repulsed the terrier with some gesture which caused the brute to whine piteously; and flung open the

parlour door bang against the sideboard. His wife, hastily washing her eyes upstairs—for she had been crying, poor tender-hearted woman—heard these ominous symptoms with dread: not abated when the sharp tones of her lord called loudly for "Mrs. G."

"Why weren't you down here when I came in?" he asked crossly. "Hey, what's this? Crying again, Mrs. G?"

Her efforts to abolish the redness with cold water had only made it more palpable, of course. She did not answer for an instant, being engaged in choking down a rebellious sob; the trifling pause exasperated her amiable husband still further.

"What's the meaning of this, Mrs. G.? What are you whimpering about? Can't a man come to his own house of an evening but he must be saluted with blubbering?"

"Them poor Bodkinses!" she broke out; "there's an execution in the house, and they're all turned into the wretchedest lodgings you ever saw, with barely their clothes, and he's expecting to be arrested."

"I thought I had forbidden your holding any intercourse with those low people," her husband observed sternly. "Answer me, Mrs. G., did I not order you to give up your intimacy with that tailor's wife?"

"It wasn't my fault," she explained, afraid to wipe away the tears quivering in her eyes. "Maria Bodkin wrote me a distracted note, saying if ever I had any regard for her I'd not refuse to see her in her trouble; and they 're as respectable as ourselves, Grimston, only they 're ruined through never being paid debts owing to them in the clothier line by parties that live as if they was as rich as Jews, which is a burning shame and a sin, though I say it that oughtn't!" The little woman felt almost valiant before her oppressor, but was cooled suddenly by the insignificant words, uttered in a highly significant manner—"Well, ma'am!" She held her peace, and prepared the speaker's tea without delay.

Since Mr. Grimston had become head clerk in the bank of Messrs. Ferrol, and removed to the genteel locality of Primrose Terrace, (where he was flanked by a half-pay officer on one side, and on the other by an archdeacon's widow,) he had deemed it incompatible with his dignity to keep up his former close acquaintance with the clothier Bodkin, suspected of driving a struggling trade. Had he been eminently flourishing, even though a tailor, the case would have been altered: our worthy Mr. Grimston would not have felt his respectability in danger of compromise. But, saith the wisest of men, "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour; the rich hath many friends." And Mrs. G., who was herself daughter to a tradesman, and had been leagued in the bonds of perpetual amity, through girlhood, with her chosen intimate Mrs. Bodkin, was constrained to give up the old friendship, except for a stolen interview now and then, as on occasion of the birth of any new little Bodkin. To-day, on receiving the note, she had ridden into town by the next omnibus, and discharged herself of an immense amount of pent-up sympathy and many tears, which somewhat comforted poor Mrs. B.; as (except in the very direst trouble) a woman is relieved by talking over her misfortunes with another woman. And she gave the full detail, beginning from the time when her husband was induced to remove from the small shop where he had carried on an obscure but paying trade, to the flashy establishment denominating itself an emporium, where he was obliged to keep up a pretension to extensive business, without capital or customers to justify it.

"And heaps on heaps of gents let their accounts run on for years and years. Bodkin was afraid to prosecute, lest he'd lose his connexion; he says there's bad debts enough on his books this present minute to set him all right if he could only get at the money. I do believe some people—gentlefolks they pretend to be—have no conscience at all!" exclaimed the poor woman, in her

impotent grief and anger. "If I was a queen, I'd make a law"— such were Mrs. Bodkin's notions of legislation—"I'd make a law that any one who bought goods and didn't pay for 'em, should be treated like a thief! I would indeed, and serve them right. What business has a gent to come into my husband's shop and take his cloth, and his time, and his labour, and walk off with it and never pay? I say he's as bad as if he stole a coat from the counter. Only, because he's a gentleman, he can do it, forsooth! Oh yes, indeed! pretty laws we have!" Mrs. Bodkin tried to laugh bitterly, but it was only hysterically. Her ideas of her husband's affairs were perhaps wrong-headed; and she certainly wanted the repose of manner which so advantageously distinguishes well-bred people: but there might be an excuse for some warmth under the circumstances. Two narrow rooms, to contain her six healthy children and an ailing one, her husband exasperated by the ruin crashing upon his prospects, which permitted only the cheerful vista of a prison, and, as highest hope, a possible certificate beyond the Bankruptcy Court: the only gleam of pleasant comfort was that her eldest son had procured a situation behind the counter at Rayment and Co.'s, with a salary which, though small, (owing to the young man's ignorance and incapacity to earn more,) was yet certain. Alas! she had little idea of how much it would cost him to keep up his "gentish" love of display: the expense of faultless gloves, and boots, and ties, absorbed everything but a mere maintenance for himself. Doctor Ferrol, learning this fact some time afterwards from his distressed mother, called him a selfish puppy; yet, was not the fault of censor and censured the same?

Two boys, next of age, were taken into a drapery establishment, of course without salary at first; and their mother thought seriously of the needle as a help for herself, to eke out the wretched means of living allowed her. She spoke to their friend, Doctor Ferrol, who still prescribed for the ailing child, that he would use

his influence to obtain her such employment. Doctor Ferrol was kind-hearted, and promised to speak to his wife, and, visiting his respected mother-in-law shortly afterwards, intended to mention the matter there. But that lady was just coming down-stairs to her carriage; he gave her his arm dutifully, and she sailed along the broad hall, arrayed in rustling raiment, all suavity and smiles.

"And how is our dear Agatha and her sweet baby?" Satisfactory answers were given. "Louisa and I were going to visit them this afternoon, but we have a prior engagement at Hunt and Roskell's."

Now she was emerging from the hall door, and entering upon the roll of carpeting spread forth by a footman. A poor woman, who had been lingering about the railings for the last half-hour, though frequently ordered off by the servants, came forward as if to speak: the man repulsed her. Mrs. Carnaby Pyke, pausing at the carriage door, and raising her eye-glass, asked benevolently what the poor creature wanted.

"Speak to her, Hughes—bring me her message." The considerate lady tranquilly deposited herself upon her cushions, and waited the report. But Hughes appeared unwilling to repeat the answer verbatim. "She's only a workwoman, ma'am," he began, obsequiously.

"Oh, poor thing! Let her come in the morning." Mrs. Carnaby Pyke leaned back out of view. "I cannot attend to her now; she must call again."

"I have called morning after morning, and you couldn't attend to me either," said the woman, pushing forward; "I only want to be paid what's owing to me these six months, for making your's and the young ladies' dresses, ma'am:" she dropped a curtsey, but laid her hand on the window, when the lady attempted to draw it up. The usually pale and placid face of the latter crimsoned. "I have no time to speak to you now," she said; "you really must go

away. Bring your account to-morrow, and it shall be examined. Hughes, tell Tomkins to drive to Hunt and Roskell's."

In spite of the servant, the poor seamstress still clung by the door. "I 'm used to such promises," she cried. "My little children are hungry, and I've no bread to give them. *They* can't wait till to-morrow."

"I think she must be mad," whispered Mrs. Carnaby Pyke to her daughter, who was fumbling for her little purse, the quick tears brimming her young eyes. "Don't give her anything—she may be an impostor; I don't recollect her face in the least."

"'Mad!' 'an impostor'" repeated the woman, getting fiercely excited. Louisa saw how the long thin fingers, joint-swollen from work, thrilled and trembled in clasping the carriage window. "I'm not an impostor! Who dare say it? I'm as honest as yourself, lady, and more so, for I'd give everybody their due."

"My poor woman," said Doctor Ferrol, who had interposed before unsuccessfully, "you are detaining this lady; I will listen to your claim, and promise to remind her of it." He gently removed her hand, just as Z 44, who had from afar spied the little social complication, came up. "Oh, poor thing, don't give her in charge!" pleaded Mrs. Carnaby with a halcyon smile of forgiveness; and the carriage rolled away. Truly that lady's manners were faultless, and her placidity almost invulnerable; as becometh those of high degree.

But the seamstress, not being gifted by nature or art with the attribute of impassibility, burst into tears—passionate and resentful tears, subsiding into those merely bitter. Doctor Ferrol heard her old, old story—yet ever new, for is it not enacted in the metropolis to this hour?—of struggling and starving on the pittance afforded by needlework, with still sharper struggles and deeper starvation, when the hard-earned wage was unpaid by carelessness, or the culpable inability of pretentious debtors. He gave

her some trifle for the present exigency, and stepped into his own carriage again.

There sat, awaiting him, his ever-following companion—Care. It was always beside him in solitude; weighting his brow with intolerable gloom when no one was looking; whispering apprehensions in every thought. The date on which the forged bill would fall due was approaching; if he had not the means of taking it up before then, a discovery must ensue. The anticipation made him almost freeze with terror. The disgrace—the shock to his friends and connexions—the penal consequences—he was aghast to reflect that from all this he was separated by but a handbreath. He had written to his uncle Sir Hugh Loftus, asking the loan of a hundred pounds in urgent terms. If that failed—if *all* failed——

A temptation which he scarce dared whisper to his inmost soul had more than once occurred to him. He recoiled from it, but it returned. A further forgery! Would there be more moral evil in two commissions of the crime than in one? Were the social and judicial penalties heavier? Oh, wretched Hugh! thus did conscience palter with expedience, and grow weaker in the contest.

He entered his own house, went to the drawing-room, looking for Agatha. A blinding flash seemed to strike his eyes, and show him—Richard Wardour standing up, and coming forward to meet him, cordially.

CHAPTER XX.

THE "CREAM OF THE CREAM."

When Dr. Ferrol could again see and hear distinctly, he was sitting in an arm-chair opposite Mr. Wardour, and beside the sofa on which Agatha lay, for she was generally ailing now, more or less. Their visitor was telling the cause of his unexpected trip to London.

"A sudden summons from my lawyers—hearing of cause to come on to-morrow," was the explanation which Doctor Ferrol comprehended, as he dallied with a paper-knife from among the pretty trifles on a side-table near him. Relieved for the moment to hear that it was not on banking business primarily that Mr. Wardour had come, his pallid countenance recovered colour in some measure, and his thoughts settled from their bewilderment. But his powers of conversation were sadly disjointed: and, except for a fortunate diversion effected by the introduction of baby, who must be looked at and caressed by uncle Richard, his embarrassment would without fail have attracted notice. And while Agatha was wrapt in admiration of her fair frail child—still deserving the epithet snowflake, for her whiteness and fragility; and uncle Richard, holding her in his strong arms, drew mental comparisons between the pretty wee creature and his own stout rosy boy, younger by some months, nevertheless larger, baby's father was gloomily fingering the pearled leaf-cutter in an abstracted mood. The mother glanced aside at him, once or twice, and finally held up the little daughter to be kissed. Papa laughed slightly, and pressed the tiny white cheek, as desired.

"She is unusually pale to-day," he remarked.

"Do you think so?" said the mother, somewhat anxiously, to her husband's words. "She is the quietest little creature possible —she never cries: I believe there is nothing the matter: nurse says she is well."

But nurse knew, perfectly as did Doctor Ferrol himself, that slowly and surely was the baby life weakening; slowly without sign was she passing from the earth. Only the mother was blind. Yet, wakened to a vague alarm, all this evening Agatha would not part with her treasure; kept the rose-lined bassinet beside her, and looked much at the little occupant, to whose features the bright colour of her cradle curtains lent a false

flush: Agatha would fain persuade herself that it was a real and healthy one.

Mr. Wardour and Hugh Ferrol dined together. They soon returned to the drawing-room, for the host felt an intolerable constraint when alone with his guest. Every kindly or confidential expression forced upon him the conviction of what a villain he had been, to abuse the trustfulness of this good man. Overflowing all his mind like a freshet flood, was the one thought of that grievous wrong and its surely coming consequences. What was he to do? Whither could he turn in his desperate perplexity? When he had given up the conversation to Agatha, he fell into long fits of silence. He heard Mr. Wardour telling how he feared they should have to leave Langholm, those legal matters were so pressing of late, he said; the lawyers had intimated that frequent personal presence would be necessary through the future steps of the business, and the expenses already incurred were very heavy. All these considerations seemed to make it imperative that he should let Langholm to a tenant, and accept the offer of a small government appointment placed at his disposal by Lord R——, on some intimation of his desire for such.

"And you will be obliged to live in London?" Agatha asked.

"I fear so. I shall probably be able to decide after the courts to-morrow, when I see how matters look, and what Caveat thinks of the progress our suit is making."

Dear Agnes! I should be so glad to have her in town!" Agatha's face brightened greatly, and then as suddenly shaded. "But it is selfish of me to say so, when I remember that she must be very sorry at the thought of leaving Langholm. I don't wonder she should. Sweet, peaceful Langholm! I was very happy there."

His own brow was sadly darkened for a minute; but he cleared away the cloud by an effort, and smiled.

"I am sure that everything will be ordered rightly, by One wiser than we are, and whom we can trust to control all events for our good," he said cheerfully. "He can make us as happy in a narrow city street as in our sweet country home, and I have little doubt but he will."

There was a pause—Agatha looked pleased; such thoughts and feelings were beginning to have more echo in her heart than ever before. Hugh broke the silence. "The expense of living in town will be much greater than at Langholm," he observed.

"We intend to be very quiet indeed," rejoined Mr. Wardour, "and live as simply as possible."

"I hope you will have a house in our neighbourhood," Agatha said; to which her brother-in-law shook his head good-humouredly, as signifying that they were much too grand for him. "Somewhere in the suburbs Agnes would prefer," he thought; and they rambled off into a discussion of the subject, and thence to a variety of other topics. Doctor Ferrol was recalled from an absence of mind by hearing his own name; he looked up.

"Oh, Hugh is very clever." Agatha glanced at him with a playful smile. "I believe his profession is getting on famously: is it not, dear?"

"As well as I can expect," he answered. "Yes, pretty well."

"Do you know that it is only very lately I discovered another talent, of which I never was aware before? He can draw *so* nicely: took a sketch of baby's head one day, with a pencil, that delighted me."

"Pooh—a mere nothing," he said, some horrible thrill of premonition striking him as to what she might say next. "I used to draw when at school——"

"Don't mind; he's always depreciating himself: he can copy anything he sees—even people's hand-writings, so that you never could tell the difference——"

Doctor Ferrol started up, with a sudden desperation, to cleave his way out of the horrid entanglement. He saw that in her innocence she would next tell how successfully he had copied Mr. Wardour's own signature; and undoubtedly she was proceeding to narrate that little incident, when his hurried gesture checked the tale. "Come, Wardour, can I set you down anywhere? I'm going to pay some evening visits, and time is up," pulling out his watch.

"If you pass near Mr. Ferrol's—your sister's, I mean——"

"Yes, to be sure. I'll drive you there." He rang the bell violently. "Carriage round in five minutes," he ordered: and stood upon the hearth-rug for the interval, talking volubly and incessantly, till the wheels paused outside. In the carriage he was silent enough; Mr. Wardour certainly thought his manner, on the whole, a little odd, but he had much to occupy his own reflections, and they parted at the banker's door with a shake-hands.

Mildred sat in the drawing-room awaiting her husband, who was going with her to the Duchess of D——'s assembly at ten. She looked well, a bandeau of diamonds crossing her abundant hair, and hardly glittering more than did her lustrous eyes. Mr. Wardour admired her with all his keen susceptibility to the influences of beauty; but how far more loveable did the gentle Agnes seem in his memory! It was as the thought of the fragrance-breathing spring violet, beside a grand scentless lily of the Nile.

She was pleased to see him; had a dozen inquiries about the little unknown nephew and his mother; was charmed to hear of the prospect of their living in London. Mr. Wardour could perceive that a warm heart existed under all that velvet and costly lace.

"I shall be at home to-morrow night. You must come and dine with us quietly, and there will be a few people here in the evening: promise me that you will come." She was so cordial that he could

not refuse. Euston Ferrol entered: thenceforth her demeanour was proud and cold, and still as a frozen midnight. What a confession of domestic dulness and discord did Mr. Wardour decipher by the reflected light of his own home happiness!

Next evening he read further and deeper into the book of her life. All its encompassing splendour was as the arctic glitter of moonlight on the columned iceberg. Oh, his own cottage home, and its sunshine of thorough confidence and love! He found no cause to change his aspiration by-and-by, when the handsome rooms became crowded with "the best" people then in London; when title after title was announced, interspersed with other unornamented names, some more full of honour than any hereditary nobleness could confer. Mildred looked equal of the highest, as she stood receiving her guests: he was near her much of the night, as she wished; occasionally they exchanged a few words.

But he ascertained by experience, if he knew it not before, that "the cream of the cream" of society could be as insipid as the veriest blue-edged London milk of inferior circles. Nay, he was certain that he had witnessed more enjoyment at one of Mrs. Cardamom's cosmopolitan *soirées* than among this prodigiously select company of the *beau monde*. As for a harvest home—the amount of hilarity and happiness at one would stock the languid gentility here present for an entire season, to dole it out in driblets at each fresh excitement.

Euston Ferrol rather liked this honest brother-in-law, whose transparently clear nature could yet be strong and solid, and withal sufficiently polished to be pleasing. When the brilliant rooms were again empty (by Mildred's desire he had waited to the last), she came up to him, where he was looking into a book.

"Now I want to know what you think of all this?" she said. "Your face was a study."

"I am honoured"—he bowed—"to have been so observed. As to what I think"—he laid his hand upon the handsome copy of "Friends in Council," which he had found.

"Yes, I am sure your opinions just coincide. It struck me when I first read the book. Yet I do not think you are quite a Timon."

"I should hope not. I would fain believe myself a benevolent person rather. But then, that is just the cause of my opinions."

"How?"

He was looking for some page in the book, and read a passage. "'How often in society a man goes out, from interested or vain motives, at most unseasonable hours in very uncomfortable clothes, to sit or stand in a constrained position, inhaling tainted air, suffering from great heat, and his sole occupation or amusement being to talk—only to talk.' And listen further: 'For want of the boldness which truth requires, people are driven into uncongenial society, into many modes of needless and painful ostentation, into various pretences, excuses, and all sorts of vexatious dissimulation.' Here's my indictment against fashionable society: is it true?"

"That's a sensible book," remarked Euston Ferrol; "but what can people do?"

Mr. Wardour had no satisfactory solution for this problem in the mass; universal truthfulness is not to be expected till universal Christianity. He had indeed a theory, by which every man was to work into his own life as much of the glorious quality as possible to his opportunities; to eschew all double-dealing of action or of word, all foundationless pretensions, all exaggerations—every shadow of that commonest form of insincerity, "keeping up appearances."

"You say you are coming to live in London, Wardour; I shall watch how you are able to illustrate these principles in practice," quoth Euston Ferrol. "For even the quietest *ménage* in town

requires *some* pretension about it, if a man would be noticed at all."

Richard Wardour laughed as he shook hands. "We shall see: perhaps it would not be so miserable to be *un*noticed," he said. "I shall see you at the bank to-morrow; I leave for home in the evening, I hope."

CHAPTER XXI.

FACE TO FACE.

WHEN Mr. Wardour went to the bank next day, to arrange other matters, he discovered the forged bill, which would fall due on the 27th instant. Old Grimston was watching him, for he watched everybody; and he saw the sudden look of incredulity—embarrassment—the deadly paleness that crossed his countenance as he closely examined the bill, and the truth burst upon him. Ferrol's confidential clerk was almost certain that Mr. Wardour had never seen that slip of paper before.

By what quick presence of mind he had held his peace and not immediately disclaimed the signature in his first surprise, he could not afterwards tell. Perhaps, because he was seldom impulsive, but cautious, weighing his words and actions with more than common care. In the minute or two that he gazed at the bill, circumstances pieced themselves together out of his memory; as steel filings fly to the magnet placed among them. Hugh Ferrol's peculiar manner, especially at the moment of their meeting—Agatha's words about her husband's ability to counterfeit handwriting—flashed a luminous light over the whole transaction. But he was astounded, nevertheless. He felt sick at heart. Simply observing, as he handed back the acceptance, "This is only the 20th," he went away.

What should he do?

Revolving that question and its answers, he walked as in a maze through much of the city's tidal multitudes, seeing and hearing little except his own thoughts. Anger and sorrow strove in his breast; it was a shock of distrust towards all men—a feeling, as if truth and honesty had fled the earth. What would be Agnes's grief and pain? His exasperation against the criminal was great; there was a struggle to repress it, and to be calmly just.

When he had decided on his course—and Richard Wardour, being a Christian, did nothing without prayerful reference to that Divine Being whom he had the privilege to know as his heavenly Father—he jumped into a cab, and drove to his hotel, countermanded his orders about departure by the evening's mail train, and wrote to Agnes that he should not be with her till a day later. Then he went to Dr. Ferrol's house.

A just resentment was strong within his heart still; and the handsome appointments of this house, dishonest as he viewed them now, tended not to alleviate his feelings. Marks was amazed at the altered look and stern tone with which he demanded his master. The doctor would be at home in half an hour, but Mrs. Ferrol was in the drawing-room. As rain was falling, he rescinded his momentary intention of walking about till his brother-in-law's return: perhaps he did not want to be painfully softened by sight of the innocent wife and child. His greeting was so grave and reserved, that Agatha inquired anxiously whether he were well, and Agnes well, and hoped nothing untoward had occurred in his legal affairs.

Nothing very injurious to him, he said; but he should not be able to return home so soon as he hoped, and he had concluded to settle in London, accepting Lord R——'s offer of a clerkship in the governmental department over which that peer presided during the existing ministry.

"Ah," said Agatha, sympathizingly, "it must be a great change, and a sorrowful one, to you with all your country tastes and habits formed:" she had a little yearning after the sweet free country life herself—a little envy of those whose lot was cast in such pleasant places as Langholm.

"It seems plainly my duty," was his reply; "and little Edmund will still have Langholm, I hope; and we might hereafter, should things turn out prosperously, be able to return there ourselves. All is for the best, I feel sure." He smiled brightly. It was clear that he could find the pleasant side of most things, even of a crossing of his cherished plans and wishes.

"Agnes used to talk just so—in that spirit, I mean; I used to envy her for such happy feelings," said the invalid. "Nothing seemed to have power to vex her much, or give her long disquiet. I wish she would teach me the art," added Agatha, with a troubled look.

"One verse contains it all," he answered gently: "'Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.'"

She listened as if the words were a benison; and on his own disturbed heart the felt memory of them came soothingly. He could see two tears trickling slowly from beneath the dark lashes on her pale face, as it was half averted: after a pause she said—

"I have a request; oh, Mr. Wardour, if God would leave me my little child!"

And presently she breathed to him the fear that was stealing over her heart concerning the beloved baby—the dubious phrases of the nurse and of the father—the acknowledged fragility of the tiny being itself. "Look at her," drawing aside the muslin curtain that shaded the little cot; "she seems almost an angel already!"

They had thought her sleeping, but the violet eyes were widely open, and the pretty crumpled lips smiled to see her mother's face; and as they were bending over the little one, Hugh Ferrol came into the room. The first glance at Mr. Wardour's countenance told him that all was discovered; he raised his hand in terrified beseeching gesture, as if he would implore silence before his wife. She, occupied with her child's smile, saw not the movement, nor the constrained greeting which followed.

To say that he had been on the rack during the last few days would not be too strong an expression for his mental sufferings since Mr. Wardour had appeared in London. The fulfilment of his dream had come upon him: the serpents he had seen coiling from each letter of that fatal signature had vivified in his very heart, gnawing it with perpetual venom-fangs. There was one chance. Mr. Wardour might not go to Ferrols' bank, or being there, the forged bill might not come under his notice, as the date was a week further than the present. To this straw of hope the unhappy criminal clung desperately. He was in better spirits than for some days past; and as he knew that Mr. Wardour purposed to leave town by the night-train, the miserable respite of a few days would follow. Perhaps Sir Hugh Loftus might be able to comply with his request for a loan; he might raise it, even at enormous usury to a money-lender; and how solemnly he vowed that, if by any means delivered from this agony of doubt and fear, he would prefer beggary itself to a further crime! As the afternoon waxed late, he became almost light-hearted at the removal, as he thought, of a temporary cause of apprehension; he sprang up the staircase, to meet at the door the vision of his ruin.

They stood face to face in the study—the injured and the injurer. Nothing but inflexible justice could Hugh Ferrol read in the fixed lineaments looking at him: how his eyes cowered and sank to the ground! Pretence was at an end, and subterfuge, and

dissimulation. His parched tongue refused to utter; he buried his face in his hands, burning with guilt and shame.

"You see that I know it all," said Mr. Wardour, when he could trust himself to speak. The humbled abject man before him was too pitiable for anger. "Oh, Hugh Ferrol, why did you commit this crime?"

Had he looked up then, he would have seen those eyes bent upon him with great sorrow in them, with great compassion for his weakness and his sin. The tones of the voice, void of irritation, conveying only the saddest reproach, thrilled him as no bitter words could have done. He had expected a storm of rage, a declaration of his public infamy; he would almost have chosen it sooner than this gentleness. He might have coped with that—he might have borne up against fierce anger; he could only abhor himself now.

"It is not solely against me, but against society, against God, that you have sinned. You know what society awards to the forger—why did not the knowledge deter you? How could you look at those innocent faces up-stairs, and consign them to infamy as the wife and child of a felon?"

Mr. Wardour was hardening himself. He looked round the luxuriously furnished apartment, where every appliance of wealth seemed collected. "To keep yourself in a fictitious position, and seem to be what you are not, you ran this frightful risk, and placed yourself in the very jaws of the merciless law, which might now send you to a penal settlement in convict's garb, leaving your wife and child to penury and disgrace."

Hugh could say nothing, so utterly broken was his spirit, but that it was true, all true. He made no excuse. But his head sank sitting there before his accuser, till his position was almost a crouch.

"I cannot ruin you," the other said, after a pause. "I cannot

deliberately give you and yours over to the fate of ignominy, which would be the result of exposure. I will take up this bill on the date that it falls due; and if you are ever in circumstances to do so, you will consider yourself bound to repay me the hundred pounds."

Hugh Ferrol looked up suddenly. Till this moment he had not doubted but that Wardour had already disowned the acceptance when first shown it in the bank. The relief was more than he could bear. Poor young man! thick choking sobs shook his whole frame. When quieter, he protested vehemently that he had committed the forgery in the firm belief that he should be able to meet the bill himself before the appointed time. "I had no thought of injuring you," he asserted, "but there were extenuating circumstances;" and he related the pecuniary pressure under which he had been.

"I don't want to excuse myself. I see now what has been my ruin all along. The hateful desire to keep up appearances has brought every misfortune upon me. I'll be done with it. I'll give up everything to my creditors, leave London, and settle in some country village. I'll put down that carriage to-morrow," he said very earnestly. "And I never can thank you enough—never, never. You have saved me from evils worse than death. You have saved my poor Agatha." And he dropped the humbled face into his hands again.

"I do not wish to disguise from you," Mr. Wardour said, "that the payment of this large sum so unexpectedly will prove a serious inconvenience to me. It has finally determined me to leave Langholm, for I shall absolutely need the money which Cardamom's son would give as fine for a lease of twenty-one years. But I will endeavour to keep Agnes from knowledge of this cause: here is the matter buried for ever betwixt you and me, Doctor Ferrol. Except," he added in a solemn tone, "for the One other witness, with whom it is *your* business to account."

Ah, little had Hugh thought of that All-seeing eye: little had he remembered that his dishonesty was a sin against Heaven as well as against men. The idea was new to him, and startling, that for this thing God also had to forgive.

Mr. Wardour extended his hand at parting. What a grasp was given! More than words could say was conveyed in that strong pressure, though the offender did not raise his head. He remained in the same attitude, afterwards: great drops falling between his fingers on the carpet—the slow, intense tears of a man's sorrow and remorse.

CHAPTER XXII.

AGNES'S PREVISIONS.

A FEW months elapsed. Before October the Wardours were settled in the metropolis. While yet the deep-swarded orchard at sweet Langholm was bearing myriads of golden and crimsoned apples aloft on its gnarled trees, and the first chrysanthemums met the last lingering dahlias in her old garden, Agnes was looking forth (whenever she had time for such idleness, which was seldom) upon a dusty road lined with rows of brick houses, interspersed with occasional blank walls. And the utmost she could yet bring herself to say about the change of dwelling was, that she should have missed Langholm more in summer certainly.

Perhaps, at first, when her husband had gone to his office, and little Edmund was taking his morning airing in a perambulator driven by the maid, Mrs. Wardour sometimes would give way to her regrets, as she arranged the narrow drawing-room, which no effort could make look lightsome or harmonious, and thought sorrowfully of the roses peeping in the windows of that dear Shropshire cottage; of the whispering trees with loving arms sheltering it; of

the broad landscape edged with a purple rim of mountains afar. But she was wiser than to let such memories gain ascendancy. Once she had wept under their influence; and thenceforth, like a sensible woman, determined that she would revert to the past as seldom as possible, till she could do so without painful regret or longing. She knew that any thought which rendered distasteful the present life in which it had pleased God to place her, should be discouraged as enervating and foolish.

Resolute adherence to this discipline of remembrance brought its reward. Soon was her town life as full of duties—therefore of delights—as had been the country life. Every day wore on, amidst a hundred small employments, towards the happy evening, the bright time for this family, when their hearts met again after many hours' severance by business cares, and had for each other a welcome enhanced by the industrious absence. Then, how cheery looked the little red parlour, with firelight dancing on the walls and glittering from the tea equipage. Did Agnes need a luxury more than *his* presence in that leather arm-chair, with the little son on his knee? Did Mr. Wardour feel that he would be happier in a splendid mansion, with a line of powdered menials waiting his beck in the hall, and Edmund in general exiled to a distant nursery, under charge of a staff of servants? By-and-by, when that lord-paramount baby was sleeping, Agnes would bring her work basket beneath the gas lamp, and listen to the newspapers and books in which her husband was interested, taking warmly his view of politics and the social questions uppermost at the time; never yawning or being listless if he dipped into such bewildering subjects as the currency or political economy; assured, in her wifely admiration, that he knew all about both, and laying down to her own stupidity that she knew nothing. Perhaps her attention wandered from a debate occasionally, into the domestic thought of how pretty Edmund would look in this braided frock, or to the

important matter of matching the buttons exactly on Mr. Wardour's shirts; and she often forgot who, in phrase of parliamentary circumlocution, was the honourable member for Mudlington, or the Right Honourable the secretary for the Red Tape Department; consequently, lost the point of many allusions. Once she took pains, privately, to learn the names of the members of the cabinet, and their respective offices, out of an almanack, in the style of a column of spelling, with explanation; she found the chief difficulty in adhering each office to its occupant, as all the places and persons had an irresistible tendency to jumble up in her memory, and the wrong labels to stick on the wrong names. But how triumphant was she, one morning, that Richard was puzzled for the title of a minister, and she was able to supply it correctly!

Mildred returned to town in January, from Mr. Ferrol's country seat, Ackworth, where that gentleman had dispensed hospitality to a numerous and distinguished circle during the Christmas holidays, and likewise dispensed justice from the neighbouring bench when occasion served. Did he ever think, while meting out punishment to poachers and petty larcenists, of the olden parable concerning a mote and a beam? He might have remembered; but dulled conscience pointed the application very lightly now.

Agnes knew not of her sister's return until the carriage drove up to the door one afternoon; and a mighty thundering, such as seldom roused the echoes of that unaristocratic neighbourhood, caused the maid-of-all-work to jump with surprise, and predisposed her to call the splendid footman "sir," very humbly, as she answered his inquiries. All along the row of houses, other maids had rushed to the windows simultaneously; and their respect for Mrs. Wardour was indefinitely augmented by seeing the richly dressed lady, who, touching the servant's arm, alighted from the beautiful carriage, and went into No. 15.

"My dear Agnes, such a search as I had to find you! We

drove twice up and down this road, and at last James inquired at a grocer's. I *am* glad to see you!" and the sisters exchanged an affectionate embrace. "Positively I longed to get away from Ackworth, whenever I remembered that you were settled in town."

She looked round the little room. Agnes had never felt it so straitened, so meagre, as at this moment, viewing it through Mildred's eyes, and by the light of Mildred's splendour. The latter may have been intuitively conscious of the feeling, for she kissed her sister's blushing face again, saying some fond words, and asked for little Edmund. The child was brought in, just awaked from a rosy sleep; and though at first he would only hide in his mother's arms, glancing forth shyly at the stranger, a friendship was established ere long. Mrs. Ferrol's horses champed and pawed impatiently for a considerable time, drove up and down the street repeatedly; still their mistress came not.

"What beautiful eyes he has!" Mrs. Wardour did not gainsay, for they were precisely his father's. All his features in turn were admired, even his exceedingly diminutive nose. Afterwards, while he was playing with the lockets and "charms" from his aunt's watch-chain, the sisters diverged to other matters.

"My whole house might be taken out of your drawing-rooms," Agnes said laughingly, in reply to some observation. "But we don't mind. A larger one would be cumbersome, without several servants; and we are very comfortable, though it is not the most fashionable locality;" and she coloured slightly. "We have but few visitors. Lady R—— was good enough to call one day, a week since."

The allusion should not have produced any exalting effect upon Mildred; nevertheless, even she experienced a sensible increase of respect for her sister's humble home, and perhaps Agnes mentioned the fact with that idea in her simple heart.

Mrs. Ferrol swung her chain for the child. "And you are very happy, dear? I need scarcely ask; you look happy, though you must have a good deal of care."

Agnes smiled. "Not so much as you perhaps think; except for the anxiety which Richard feels about these lawsuits."

"And why," interrupted Mildred, quickly, "if you could at all afford it, why not take a better house in some better neighbourhood? These very small rooms—it can hardly be healthful to live in them."

"Ah! but if we had a larger house, the rent and rates would of course be increased also, and our means would feel much more circumscribed," returned Agnes. "I think Richard is wise in not cumbering himself with a large annual deduction from his income, which would compel us to be sordid and screwing in other expenses. We keep up no appearance, you observe; that makes it greatly easier to live comfortably for ourselves; for Richard says the most expensive item in housekeeping is 'our neighbours' eyes.'"

"Everything that Richard says is right, I suppose," laughed Mildred, as she rose to depart. "It is a pleasant delusion, little Agnes. Remember that you and your paragon husband are engaged to dine with me and mine to-morrow evening at seven. Come as early as you can, and we will have a chat."

Mr. Wardour would greatly have preferred one of the usual quiet evenings at home, but was sufficiently under wifely control to see the propriety of accepting the invitation. He acquiesced with a feigned groan.

"I hope it is not a company night."

"Oh no, only ourselves. Mildred and I want to have a talk; and you can settle your favourite topic of the currency with Mr. Ferrol. I suppose he understands it, being a banker."

Her husband stirred the fire thoughtfully. Certain rumours

astir in the city—like dark mists creeping silently about over marshy grounds, but skulking from daylight—occurred to him disagreeably.

"A letter from my mother," Agnes said, a minute after the postman's knock was heard. But until the king-baby took his departure, it could not be read: he was a little monopolist, and would admit no sharer of public notice with himself. Agnes's soft laughter by-and-by attracted Mr. Wardour's attention from the review which he was reading.

"What's the matter, dear?"

"Only an idea of mine," she answered, composing her face. "A foolish thought that struck me. Mamma writes a pleasant letter; she speaks a good deal of that Major Currie, who seems a constant visitor at Aunt Loftus's."

"Oh, the old East Indian. I wonder whether it is Honoria or Bidelia he fancies?" Mr. Wardour remarked, thinking himself extremely penetrating.

"Neither, you foolish man. But do you know an idea *did* occur to me." Agnes laughed and blushed again; the obtuse Richard still comprehended not till she told him that, for a wise and learned head like his, he was wonderfully dull.

"Oh—your mother! Nonsense! impossible!" Agnes, having the woman's art of vaulting over mental obstacles, soon demonstrated that the circumstance was hardly unlikely, much less impossible. "You know that mamma is not well off, and this old gentleman has, she says, a reasonably good income; and as to him—you remember what a fine woman she is, even yet, and her manners are most engaging."

Mr. Wardour had his own opinion respecting other qualities of the Ferrol *mère*, as calculated to make Major Currie happy, but held his peace.

"From the whole tone of her letter I should say it was intended

as a preparative to some further communication;" and she read it for him.

"Is that all?" he said, rather despairingly. "Love, you are a very wise little woman if you are able to discover lurking matrimony in that."

"Wait," she replied, holding up her finger; "wait a few posts more. I understand these matters better than you, though you are such a dear clever man;" and the review, with copious extracts, of an important new statistical work, which Mr. Wardour would persist in reading aloud, was, we fear, little heard by her during the rest of the evening; for a series of abstracted smiles passed over her countenance, which certainly could not be attributed to either that learned production or to the stocking she was mending.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. FERROL'S DEBTS PAID.

THE unpleasant rumour which had reached Mr. Wardour's ears in the city, concerning Ferrol's bank, returned to his memory as he sat after dinner with the chief partner of that establishment. When the ladies had retired, Euston Ferrol drew his chair to the fireplace, and placed a small table between him and his guest, to which he removed several decanters and their glasses. Before long it began to dawn upon his companion that Euston Ferrol was drinking deeply. Evidently, the circumstance was not uncommon, and at first he was somewhat genialized; his ordinary cynicism softened into a seeming of agreeability. But Wardour's eyes were opened by a subsequent freeness of speech, which he had never before heard from his ordinarily close and subtle brother-in-law. *In vino veritas;* and the banker not only declared opinions

respecting his connexions on all sides, frequently the reverse of flattering, but even relaxed on the subject of his own affairs more than was his wont in daylight.

"This still Sillery—why don't you take some, Wardour? what a lovely amber colour it is!—reminds me of my amiable mother-in-law's little attentions before she succeeded in capturing me—her *petits soupers* in Bruton Street. Amiable woman, Mildred's mother. Heard her cuffing the page one morning that the poor little wretch admitted me without orders. Clever woman, too: kept up appearances amazingly, on next to nothing. Used to puzzle me how she did it."

And, as he lay back in the arm-chair, he remembered the three hundred cheque drawn one morning, and never since heard of.

"I believe it was by never paying anybody," he continued with a sneer. "By the way, Sir Hugh was with me to-day, fresh from the Emerald Isle; he has had a schedule filed against him in the Estates Court, and was trying to persuade me to become fiftieth creditor on a property that will pay about the first ten; but he says she's had an offer from an East Indian with a large fortune."

"Indeed!" Mr. Wardour instantly conceived a high idea of his wife's sagacity.

"I presume the old lady wants her debts paid," remarked the other. "Clever woman, that. Another lady to match is Mrs. Carnaby Pyke. She angled for me, too—bait, poor little Agatha. Very pretty creature she was, once; but the most changed being since her marriage: they set out on an absurdly high scale. A fellow with three hundred a-year undertaking expenses fit for a man of a thousand a-year! I have no patience with such extravagance. Why there isn't a crash in that quarter I can't conceive; and, tell you what, the father-in-law is not much safer."

Mr. Wardour felt it unjustifiable to pick up the secrets of strangers in this manner; he suggested adjournment to the drawing-room;

so his entertainer rang for coffee, continuing his own devotion to the decanters notwithstanding. When they went up-stairs, his face was flushed, and his hand unsteady, as his wife's quick eye saw, the moment they entered. Her irrepressible glance of disgust was not lost upon Agnes, nor the momentary shudder with which she endured his touch, as he came to sit beside her on the sofa. He talked too much, of course; said many things which in clearer moments he would not have uttered; and Agnes was the wiser of one sad secret of her sister's heart, while she sat at the tea-table, and tried to appear unconscious of it all. The warmth of her embrace, afterwards, in the gorgeously appointed dressing-room, as she prepared to go away, fairly unnerved Mildred: she burst into tears.

"Don't speak to me! Don't say you pity me!" Her beautiful face was covered with the long white hands jewelled with costliest rings. "Oh, Agnes, it is nothing to other times! It is nothing to the evenings at Ackworth: and—and—I don't know what to think, he says such dreadful things!"

"Oh, Mildred!" Neither spoke for a few minutes. Mrs. Ferrol was calming herself. "Forgive me," she said. "I am so unused to friendship, that I hardly believe in sympathy, and I hate compassion. He is my husband, and for weal or woe I am bound to him, even if he were the worst of what he says at times. Oh, dear Agnes, you are happy! you are secure! you know not how happy and secure! Good night;" and she kissed her intensely. And Mrs. Wardour's thick veil was over her face as she shook hands with Mr. Ferrol a few minutes afterwards. She wept very quietly in the cab going home. Not but that Richard had some suspicion of it, however, and some divination of the cause.

In the meantime, across the Irish Channel, Mrs. Ferrol the elder had been managing matters for herself, as she was capable of doing. Her debts had not diminished since her residence in

Dublin: a new one of considerable magnitude had been contracted with Madame Mauve, the well-known court milliner of Grafton Street, and she was seriously alarmed by the sudden conveyance of an acquaintance (who existed on the same credit-principle) to the safe keeping of one of her Majesty's mansions for the entertainment of debtors. Madame Mauve was known to be a relentless creditor—where she had nothing to gain by being lenient. It was at her suit that the unfortunate Mrs. Flashington was transmitted to the secure residence aforesaid. Mrs. Ferrol began to think of interposing her antique admirer, Major Currie, between her and any similar misfortune. How glorious that principle of British law, thought the lady, which identifies husband and wife so far that he must pay what I owe! He had at least his pension, with something extra in consideration of a cork leg gained in the H. E. I. C.'s service. Rumour ran that he had hoards of rupees besides; and she knew that his was likely to be her last offer, as she was advancing in the vale of years. Her children had all enough to do in holding their own ground: accordingly, much to the scorn and indignation of the Misses Honoria and Bidelia Loftus, who, never having had husbands themselves, thought that a succession to any one woman's share was totally unfair, but who, neither of them, would marry Major Currie—oh dear no! not for worlds! not for any consideration!—Mrs. Ferrol accepted the old gentleman, and they were married quietly one morning at St. Peter's church.

Madame Mauve had desisted from sharp proceedings in contemplation, when the intended match was spoken of; but when from Wicklow the wedded pair had returned, and upon the pier at Kingstown were strolling one fair afternoon, with purple Howth before them, miles across the blue swelling waters of the bay, the unsuspecting bridegroom was gently tapped on the shoulder, and informed of a writ in the sheriff's hands against him. There

was no immediate resource: to the queen's prison went he for many days of the honeymoon, and thus did Mrs. Ferrol pay her debts. Madame Jupon sent over a detainer for the amount of her bill; other of his lady's London creditors did the like. The domestic felicity ensuing may be imagined, rather than described. It was cat and dog life realized. Who shall say that she had not deserved it? Henceforth we have done with her; she passes from this story, linked with a decrepit valetudinarian, his temper embittered by remembrance of the injury she had done him, his trust in her for ever ended.

If we were to whisper a moral to her, ere she disappears among the shadows of such a life, we would say—"In the misfortunes and misconduct of your children, behold the legitimate result of your own principles, and of the training you bestowed. You taught them, as well by precept as by the greater power of example, to live altogether for appearances—to find their highest ambition in a simulation of wealth. The lesson has been carried out faithfully; and instead of passing truthful, simple, happy lives, prosperous whereinsoever was God's will, by honest industry and talent, your sons have been fevered with restless endeavour, not to *be*, but to *seem*; and miserable has been their failure."

Thus would we moralize, as the late Mrs. Ferrol passes away from sight or speech, behind the scenes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BUBBLE BROKEN.

AGATHA was not stronger as the spring-time deepened, and the days lengthened towards summer again. Her little child had died during a night in the past autumn. Great was the mother's loneliness and longing: it was as though a part of her own nature had died. She ceased to be much troubled by minor vexations; after that deep sorrow, a repose of spirit seemed to come in its train, as the coolness of shadow follows a cloud. The Bible became her continual companion. Affliction was made in her case, as in many others, a means of inward blessing, and she felt the need of something to lean upon while all earthly supports were crumbling away.

She had a continual uncertainty about her husband's position as to money matters. He never alluded to them; but she saw his morose demeanour. At the time of Mr. Wardour's visit in the past summer, he had suddenly laid down his carriage and discharged the coachman, without assigning any cause: much to the horror of Mrs. Carnaby Pyke, who commiserated her sweet Agatha deeply under the privation. That very movement towards an honester life, less tinselled with pretences, had brought on him a host of creditors, who were, foolishly enough, more disposed to tolerate his debts while an equipage seemed to guarantee his solvency.

An event occurred during the winter, which greatly agitated Agatha. Doctor Ferrol was sent for one evening in great haste to see his neighbour, Mr. Glanvil, who was seized with sudden illness. Whatever was its nature, the patient rapidly sank; and though

the renowned Sir Lancett Pyke was summoned, he only shook his wise head, assented to Doctor Ferrol's treatment, and confirmed his gloomiest anticipations. The hard-working, over-driven lawyer, worn out by a life of strenuous labour and anxiety, could not bear up against the shock of acute disease: and, as the papers say in cases of humbler people, "he left a large family totally unprovided for."

This is bad enough where the deceased is a bricklayer or a railway guard, whose wife and children have the refuge of their own hands, or at worst of the parish; but what shall be said of the professional gentleman's family—who have been accustomed to refined comforts, perhaps to a degree of luxury—who have been educated in artificial wants—suddenly plunged into utter penury by the death of the husband and father on whom their all depended? Here is a helpless misery, perhaps the most pitiable of the varied forms of distress in modern society.

During her first despair, even Mrs. Glanvil, that careful, secretive woman, who had for twenty-five years striven successfully to keep up appearances, seemed to abandon all reserve, and gave way to a wild sorrow. Doctor Ferrol discovered that a mere life income had been their sole reliance; that even a policy of insurance had never been effected. Still, the late eminent common-law practitioner, Blackstone Glanvil, Esq., must have a grand funeral—as many of the ensigns of woe as Mr. Graves, the fashionable undertaker, could assemble—a following of mourning coaches equal to that of any other opulent deceased. The widow suspended her tears to glance at the handsome *cortège* through a crevice in an upper blind, and was even a little comforted by the reflection that not one symptom of their dire poverty was apparent; that she had kept up appearances well, to the very last.

Mr. Graves's heavy bill was another consideration. How was it to be met? How were any bills to be met? How was even

bread to be obtained? In the grim days which followed the funeral, there was leisure sufficient to contemplate these questions. The widow possessed a few hundred pounds, left her by a relative. This must be sold out of the Three per Cents. and applied to meet present necessities. Then the sons and daughters must go forth to earn for themselves. One youth was at Oxford, where he had been living as the son of a man of wealth, incurring heavy expenses of all kinds, that he might seem on an equality with Sir Alfred Littlego, and young Rupee (son of a partner in Ferrols' bank), and a score other extravagant undergraduates, his particular friends. For his mother's strongest injunction to him had been to keep good society; meaning by the term, not those whose conduct was best, but those whose follies and vices had the palliative of high birth or wealth. And now the poor lad was in a sort of desperation; he had heavy bills against him at the university, and though no legal proceedings could be instituted while he was a minor, yet he shrank from returning there as a pauper. He must seek a situation as tutor. Alas! he had attended more to rowing-matches than to scholarship: who would recommend him? what could he teach? From habits of idleness and profuse expenditure he must suddenly change to laborious industry and economy: what wonder that he found the grafting of these virtues difficult? His final remove was to be junior usher at a school, perpetually drilling the smaller boys through the Latin declensions, at a salary of five-and-twenty pounds per annum.

Other two youths of the Glanvil family were not qualified for even this fate. One, the youngest and most self-willed, some time after enlisted in the Company's service; the second, whom his father had intended to send to the Temple, subsided into a pettifogging attorney's clerk; and like a millstone round their necks through life were the expensive tastes created and fostered by their early training. But the daughters, what became of them?

(Oh, most helpless of human beings, the penniless young lady!) Governesses they must be, of course. They had received a showy education, so far as that name can be applied to accomplishments; they could sing and play tolerably, without knowledge of a single principle of the theory of music; consequently, were incapable of teaching it except superficially. Appearances had been the rule here, as in other things; so long as they could warble Italian canzonets, or could say that they were studying German, their real progress in either language was of no consequence. But qualifications may be taken for granted in common life, which are severely examined when money is expected by their means. These poor girls suffered the mortification of rejection in many quarters, and had at last to be content with situations far inferior to their pretensions. Miss Dora Ferrol was looking for a companion about this time: Rosa Glanvil sought and obtained the enviable post, combining some of the duties of a waitingmaid with all those of a housekeeper and secretary; requiring unflagging energies, good spirits, good humour, and good sense, to bear endless whims and slights from the lady employer. As poor Rosa had not these virtues in continual exercise, but was subject to the vanities and quick feelings of her age and sex, aggravated by her frivolous bringing up, Miss Ferrol and she disagreed a good deal, which was indeed habitual with the elder lady towards her companions, and perhaps rather an agreeable excitement, but to the younger one was the source of much unhappiness. She dared not resent petty insults, when she thought of her own helplessness; and often the same recollection caused her to descend to the meanness of small flatteries.

Mrs. Glanvil herself, a week after her husband's death, penned an affecting letter to her noble friend Lady Glenmoriston; whose had been one of the titles announced at Mrs. Glanvil's parties, and who had testified a regard for that lady on many occasions. The

composition of this letter was careful, not to say elaborate; Mrs. Glanvil spent a day and a night's thought over its well-dashed paragraphs; for she wished still to keep up appearances, and convey only the delicatest hint of her embarrassed circumstances. What she expected from Lady Glenmoriston, it would be difficult to say; she had a misty idea that pensions were sometimes bestowed upon needy gentlewomen. But when the coroneted answer was left at the door by a superb person in sky-blue livery, and proved to be a note sympathizing very politely, and regretting very deeply the writer's want of influence, Mrs. Glanvil could have groaned aloud. The postscript offered her a vacancy (value twenty pounds yearly, and two rooms) in a widows' almshouse established by the late lord at Glenmoriston Park, Yorkshire. The poor lady wept bitterly. She had not anticipated any such downfal as this; but, after a few impotent struggles, she had to submit. Few were aware of her real prospects or destination: she contrived to shroud her movements in such a veil of mystery, that her more credulous acquaintances believed she had gone on a permanent visit to Glenmoriston Park, as guest to her noble friend aforesaid. And thus she made her exit from her former sphere, still plausibly upholding appearances.

Does she ever think, sitting in her very small almshouse parlour (she is acknowledged chief lady among the widows by common consent, in virtue of her former social rank, which is her dearest topic of conversation and of thought), does she think of the guilt and injustice she has done,—of the misery she has caused? Oh, the scalding tears, the sharp humiliations, the drudgeries, the oft-times bitter hearts of those three daughters earning their bread, in woman's painfullest way; not altogether because of their position in life, but because of their total want of special training or of discipline for such employment—because the hardness of labour was never contemplated, while the soft idleness of admitted com-

"AS WHITE AS THE WHITE HANDKERCHIEF TO HIS LIPS WAS THE FACE THAT LOOKED AT THE SHERIFF'S OFFICERS ENTERING.'

petence was indulged till it became almost a necessity. What censure is too strong for those parents who rear their children in a fictitious position, far above their real means? with but one slender life, or it may be, with only the bubble of a speculation between them and destitution: this New-year's day in a home replete with the refined enjoyments and elegances of wealth; the next, perchance, adrift upon the cold wide world, feeling every blast piercing in proportion to their previous shelter. Are not such chances accumulating even now? Is not the dominant social fault of this nineteenth century the perilous love of appearance?

Agatha was very sorry for the Glanvil girls, who had good-naturedly been her frequent companions while she was confined to the sofa, and had poured into her sympathizing ears more of their plans for self-help than their mother ever knew. But her attention was soon diverted by another occurrence. Not many mornings after the well-known house was shut up, and labelled "To Let," she was sitting at breakfast with her husband—looking indeed very delicate and fragile, yet feeling a little stronger since April sunshine came—when there was a knock at the hall door, disagreeable, peremptory; one of those concerning which there is an involuntary premonition that nothing pleasant is coming. Doctor Ferrol laid down his paper as the sound of voices in altercation reached him; he pushed back his chair, and rose.

"What can it be, I wonder?" said Agatha.

As white as the white handkerchief to his lips was the face that looked at the sheriff's officers entering. He said nothing, except. "I have expected this for some time;" started when he felt his wife's cold hand laid on his, and led her from the apartment. She hardly asked a question; it seemed to stun her. When he returned to her room, after a short absence with the bailiffs, she was quietly collecting her clothes, as he had bade her, and said she would not go to her mother's, but to Agnes—to dear Agnes.

Every one in the street had news of the executions put into Dr. Ferrol's house. His wife had a note from him in the evening, dated at the Marshalsea.

Strange to say, now that the worst had fallen, he was tranquiller than many a time in anticipation of it. Perhaps few evils are so bad as the pictures of them that imagination colours; but he had a sort of desperate calmness. He refused the intervention of Mr. Naggs's choice hotel, as tending to a needless accumulation of fees. Actually in the prison room, with all lost, he was composed and clear-headed, suffering from no extraordinary depression of spirits; perhaps because he saw a gleam beyond, of a truthful unshackled career yet possible to him, despite his errors and his follies.

In the room adjacent to his, on the common stair, the residents were very far from despondency, as was made manifest by peals of laughter, and comic songs, echoing into the dismal stone passages. When the turnkey came to fasten the doors for the night, Doctor Ferrol inquired the names of the parties opposite.

"In thirty-two, sir? The celebrated Mr. Swyndle, sir, that failed for ninety thousand a fortnight since: you may have heard of Swyndle and Co., sir; the affair made a great noise. All the papers full of it. A very agreeable gentleman, sir—very agreeable."

The fellow evidently had a species of professional respect for this great insolvent, which the small one he spoke to failed to excite. And so it was. All the prison authorities, from Mr. Shackell the governor, downwards, were exceedingly polite to Marmaduke Swyndle, Esq., who had committed the grand fraud of failing for a trifle over eighty-nine thousand pounds, while, upon his own showing, the assets of the company amounted to only twenty-seven thousand. We may mention, as further illustration of this gentleman's mode of "keeping up appearances," that the sum eventually realized from these assets was little more than eleven thousand

pounds; and the dividend paid to ordinary creditors of the firm was sevenpence and a tenth of a penny in each pound. As for the debts of Mr. Swyndle in his private capacity, the dividend was some infinitesimal fraction. And this great mercantile feat had been effected by the clever man in question, with a very small capital of cash, though a large one of plausibility and presumption: enabling him to gull even experienced bankers by a judicious use of the "kite-flying" or bill system. Rumour had whispered that Ferrols' had suffered heavily. Mr. Swyndle bore his creditors' losses with exemplary equanimity.

Though Hugh had held up pretty well for his first evening, he found the night intolerable. The sense of imprisonment—the remembrance of all that lay between him and the life of but yesterday—the array of follies and of faults that had brought him to this pass—the knowledge that, in one sense, his character was irretrievably injured—these things tormented him like knotted scourges. Through the dark hours, swung hoarsely from the great gaol clock, he paced to and fro; sometimes looking through the bars of the window at the broad silent heaven mapped with stars. Poor Bodkin, the tailor, coming to see him in the morning, was startled by his haggard face.

"Doctor, you musn't take on so—you musn't indeed. Many a gentleman's none the worse for this," he said consolingly. His own ill-shaved visage looked mournful enough. Again and again had he been remanded by the commissioner of bankrupts, owing to complications in his case. Doctor Ferrol felt quite as if he had been an old friend. They had much conversation, and the bankrupt poured out all his woes. Mrs. Bodkin and the little 'uns came regularly to see him; but his eldest son, the boy he had brought up as a gentleman, never came. "A shilling to little Bill was all he ever gave 'em, sir; and he knows they're in straits often. But his own studs and sleeve-buttons and cigars are more to him

than kith or kin," the father added hopelessly. "I'm afraid he'll come to no good, poor lad;" a prediction verified a year or two subsequently, when, being detected in some act of peculation at Rayment's, (for his expensive dress, amusements, and luxuries could not be altogether kept up out of his narrow salary,) he was sentenced to some months' imprisonment with hard labour.

The barred window of the room looked out over a great court-yard: while they were talking, there was noise below of doors opening and men tramping.

"Prisoners going to court for to-day's trials," observed Bodkin, with interest. "What a handsome man that is, the second to the left—and so well dressed."

"I wonder what is his crime," Doctor Ferrol said carelessly.

"Forgery," was the answer. Though Bodkin went on to relate particulars, nothing but the first word remained in his hearer's understanding. Pale as he had been before, he was ten shades paler now, as he looked at the man no whit more criminal than himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

AND LAST.

The usual stages of insolvency were gone through in Doctor Ferrol's case; in due course he applied for relief under the Act, and was discharged. A humbled and a broken man, he walked from the court with his one firm friend, Richard Wardour, who had held close to him all through these troubles. When his hosts of summer friends deserted the insolvent, and there was a great clamour about his fallen name as the common prey of the vultures

who batten upon ruined fortunes and fame, then this truthful and noble heart changed not a jot of his conduct, unless it were that he became more cordial and helpful than ever.

His other brother-in-law, Mr. Ferrol the banker, meanwhile had not testified the least interest in him or his concerns. Indeed, people whispered that that gentleman's own hands were quite full enough at present, owing to the terrible damage inflicted by Swyndle's bankruptcy; and yet, a brilliant series of entertainments were being given in his Belgravian mansion to the *élite* of the London world. People had their ready whisper about this costly display likewise; though they saw not the many restless hours passed in his library night after night, (when poor labouring men were in deep sweet sleep,) brooding over papers and piles of office books, till his very brain became on fire, and his body began to waste under the harassing influence. Mildred was sufficiently miserable: she stood as on a crater cone, not knowing where the gulf would burst, and the fiery eruption heave ruin upon them. To do her justice, her apprehensions were not solely selfish; but her husband was of a nature that repelled sympathy. She dared not even seem to suspect that he needed it: the furrowed face, the haggard eye, must pass unnoticed by her, lest she should incur a violent outbreak of wrath; and his perilous comforter, the purple wine, alone had power to soothe his tumultuous thoughts, or momentarily excite his jaded spirits.

Agatha lay this evening in the little red parlour, watching, waiting for, her recovered husband. She had never been able to visit him in prison; the shock received on that last morning in their own home had been too much for her strength. Great weakness had seized her in nerve and limb. Sir Laucett Pyke had spoken more unfavourably of her case to Agnes than the poor patient herself knew; for she still clung to a dream of living with Hugh in some simple country retirement, where the errors of the

past might be perhaps retrieved, and a tranquil lapse of days environ their twin existence—sufficient to each other. Had he a baseless dream of something similar, as he drew nigh, through the wilderness of streets, to the loving heart which he knew was expecting him anxiously? If so, his vision was dispersed after he had looked at her, worn and wan, but with the flush of delight upon her thin cheek, and oh, such a straining power in her feeble arms! Down on his knees by the couch, clasping that almost transparent hand, he hid his face from the too earnest gaze of her unnaturally bright and eager eyes, lest she should read his sudden hopelessness. Agnes, tears in her kind face, went away to the little passage, where Mr. Wardour was much longer in disposing of his hat and overcoat than was usual or necessary; and together this husband and wife, whose happiness had nothing to forget or forgive, resorted to the child's nursery, where Master Edmund sat at his little table, vouchsafing graciously to eat his supper.

The cordial of this joy revived the invalid for a little time. But soon, as by a presageful instinct, she ceased to talk of what they should do when she was strong again: from before her eyes, like the fairness of snow, melted the promise of earthly future. One day when her favourite sister Annette had been sitting with her alone, the girl returned from the interview with tearful and sorrow-stricken face. Not till her decline had visibly deepened, did she speak to Hugh about its termination. One evening on coming home from his hospital duties, (the interest of his connection, Sir Lancett, had kept the place open for him,) he found that she had been too weak to rise all day. He hurried to her bedside, and was relieved to find that no great change had taken place.

"You frightened me, dear Agatha," he said, half involuntarily.

She smiled, smoothing his hand with her warm weak fingers.

"It is not very far off, I think;" and wistfully she sought his averted look. "Dear husband, we have been silent about it too long."

He gazed at her now.

"What would you say? what would you have me say? Only that this world will be an utter desert without you——" He suddenly broke short, as if something choked his utterance.

Then she spoke to him her new thoughts, of living for duty towards God and men; her new hopes of the heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord. But he interrupted her with vehement self-accusation: he had been the blight on her life; his ambition and foolish pretension had laid upon her endless anxieties and cares, which were severer than her delicate frame could bear. She listened quietly; only with the measureless pity in her countenance which is often testified by the dying towards the turmoil of the living. What truth was in his words she did not deny. "But I would rather have had all the care," she said, "than the happiest life without you."

He was rarely absent from her thenceforth, except when compelled to be absent by his duties at the hospital. As gently as the light departs from a long flickering lamp her life went out.

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Two years have elapsed since she died. Dr. Ferrol lives near the Wardours—the sadness of that loss over him still. But he has since put his feet on the lower rungs of the ladder, and is slowly climbing to repute in his profession, by the true and successful path of labour and study. He is beginning to be recognised as a clever thinker and accurate observer: his papers are much valued in the medical journals; hence proceeds increasing private practice, with its fruit of increasing income. So much does he detest the idea of pretentious living or ostentatious appearances, that his friends find fault with the simplicity of his household; they re-

monstrate concerning the expediency of a better residence, handsomer furniture, etc.: he smiles and is stedfast.

For some of his superfluous gains he has use, in annual gifts to a certain widow lady, who, as the phrase runs, has seen better days. She resides, with five daughters, in a genteel suburb, where the houses are very small, but elegant—so small, that how three of the five young ladies are disposed of at night is a problem to their most intimate acquaintances. The widow has no carriage now, consequently can hardly be persuaded to go out, but comports herself towards visitors with a mien befitting Mrs. Carnaby Pyke's distinguished antecedents. While Mr. Pyke lived, she was in very different circumstances; that everybody knows, and is ready to echo, "What a reverse of fortune!" though, in reality, that fickle dame and her wheel had little to do with the reverse: it was the necessary sequence of the Pyke system of overliving.

The sixth daughter, Annette, finding an existence of idle penury insupportable, broached the scheme of making her accomplishments available to earn a living for herself. The proposition raised a storm. Mrs. Carnaby wept at the degeneracy of her child, thus to desert the principles in which she had been brought up; spoke of the "appearance" of such an action, as proclaiming openly the poverty which it was the dearest wish of her heart to hide. Annette was sensible enough not to press the matter at that time: she went on privately with her studies, qualifying herself as best she could to become a school-teacher; and at last, in a great domestic strait, she obtained permission. Though her employment was arduous, she was happier (and how much more to be honoured) than the idle and discontented girls at home, whose weary, aimless days dragged slowly past, amid regrets and jarrings, every year diminishing the one chance for which they vaguely hoped—that of marriage. Well did Dr. Johnson write, that "concealed poverty is the corrosive which destroys the peace of numberless families."

A proximate cause of poor Mr. Pyke's death-illness had been the failure of Ferrols' bank for an immense sum. Mr. Euston Ferrol's disappearance was coeval with cessation of payment; and by no vigilance of detective could he be spied throughout Europe. Then was the gigantic fraud laid bare; the systematic peculations of years revealed; the Belgravian mansion and its contents taken in execution; Ackworth taken in execution; a rigid search instituted through the continents of the globe, wherever a British policeman could penetrate, for the chief partner of the house. His wife was homeless, and, until some arrangements could be made, she was penniless, unless for her trinkets. The worth of the world's friendship was tested, and found wanting; there was hardly even a profession of sympathy for her sorest of trials. With difficulty Agnes persuaded her to come to them on a short visit. Some of her friends recommended her as English teacher in a continental school; and there the proud Mildred hid herself, while Euston Ferrol has been fulfilling his term of penal servitude.

Among those ruined by his fall, was the *juvenile* lady, his aunt. Poor Miss Dora Ferrol had been induced by her plausible nephew to remove a large sum from the funds to the safe keeping of his bank, under a guarantee of increased interest. She rejoiced in the augmented income but a little time, when the crash came, and she lost all. Such was her despair, that even the youthful complexion and charming curls were forgotten. Rosa Glanvil never knew how unreal was the woman with whom she dwelt, until this catastrophe. The same almshouse for distressed gentlewomen which shelters Mrs. Glanvil, gave asylum to Miss Dora; who for a time was too dispirited to dispute the former lady's pre-eminence. But she has since recovered; and though cosmetics are no longer within her reach, and she has been compelled to own to ten years' additional age, she yet has contested Mrs. Glanvil so well, that the old ladies

have divided on the subject, several paying the spinster fealty instead of the matron. This dignified squabble is a chief interest in life to them; and if my Lady Glenmoriston pays a whit more attention to one than to the other, during her visits at the Park, an amount of exultation and jealousy is elicited on either side, sufficient to stock rival courtiers.

Letters from India make Agnes Wardour happy about her brother Horace. He has kept the resolutions with which he parted from English soil, and abstained from debt by laying down needless luxuries. Many there were to jeer at his parsimony and puritanism, as they called it, but his lesson had been too sharply imprinted to need re-learning. He now sees that the delusion of "Keeping up Appearances" is one of the saddest and most seducing snares on the high road to ruin; that its falsity is directly opposed to the spirit of manliness which should characterize the true gentleman—the honest and brave soldier. A respect unknown while he was merely a good fellow and boon companion, attends the young lieutenant in consequence; he acts up to his principles, he is no time-server, but thorough and true in his conduct, studying his profession well, though he is aware he has no genius, nor will ever be a Duke of Wellington.

And dear Agnes and her husband continue to live their old truthful life, void of pretences, full of earnest well-doing; training their son Edmund, and his baby brother, by and by, in the same righteous course. One of the lawsuits about the late squire's wrecked property has turned out in Mr. Wardour's favour, the other is yet pending. His wife does not at all repine at residence in London now: looking forward to her boys' education in years to come, it seems a fortunate circumstance. They have not many brilliant acquaintances, and are wholly out of the great upper world of fashionable society: are they the less happy for that? Answer, ye who have been among the stars, and found the atmo-

sphere cold: few of us but would prefer the ruddy fireside glow to such chilly splendours.

But of all fireside bliss they have an abundant share. Agur's desire, "neither poverty nor riches," has befallen them. With other management, their means might feel narrow; but where there is no outside gilding required, the gold can be spent on satisfactions more personal and durable, or laid up for the young ones; or a portion allotted to help in pious works. They are not uneasy about the future, as it is not unprovided for, humanly speaking; neither has the present unseemly straits, or wretched subterfuges, as income is always wider than expenditure. In their domestic arrangements and social relations, as well as in matters of higher moment, they ever seek to do what is right in the sight of God, whatever may be the usages and opinions of the world. Hence their tranquil and enjoying hearts; and all, Mr. Wardour says, is traceable to their early relinquishment of that disastrous principle,

"KEEPING UP APPEARANCES."

A WIFE'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

FAIR HOLT.

I HAVE only an indistinct remembrance of my mother, who died when I was very young—too young to be fully sensible of the loss I had sustained, though, for a time, I sadly bemoaned it. I judge, from my mother's portrait, which after her death hung in my father's dressing-room, that she was fair and lovely in countenance; and I am sure, from the lifelong tenderness and affection with which he cherished her memory, that she must have been gentle and loving. I know this also from other testimony. All who had ever known her, spoke of her many excellences; and the best wishes that could be expressed for *me*, were that I might be like *her*.

My father did not marry again; and I, his only child, soon learned of how much importance I was to his daily comfort and happiness. Our home was a pleasant country house, not far from a considerable town in one of the midland counties. It had a fine large garden, and a park-like meadow, in which I delighted to run wild, as my nursemaid used to say—free from restraint, as my father expressed it.

My father was not rich; but he had an independent income which allowed him many of the enjoyments and luxuries of private country life, and gave him the position of a gentleman. His chief

occupation, or rather amusement, was in overlooking a small farm which formed part of his estate. His establishment was not large. It consisted of a housekeeper—an elderly female, who treated me with uniform well-meant kindness, and indulged most of my childish wishes; two or three female servants, one of whom was my nursemaid and attendant, and a man who was both gardener and groom.

We saw but few visitors after my mother's death, for it was understood that my father had, by that event, considered himself withdrawn from general society. He had some friends, however, to whom his doors were always open, and some neighbours, who could scarcely be called friends, against whom they could not, with politeness and courtesy, be closed. Among the former was the minister of the parish, a middle-aged and very grave gentleman, who drank tea with my father regularly once a week, and sometimes dined with him. He had never been married, and his name was Temple—the Reverend George Temple. The parsonage house was a small but fine old place, and Mr. Temple had taken pains to ornament and improve it. He was rich, independently of his clerical income, and was rather lavish in his expenditure. He was simple in his personal tastes and habits, however; and if the enlargement and adornment of his house seemed a contradiction to this, it was not so in reality.

"You see, Mr. Maitland," I remember his once saying to my father, when he had been adding a wing to the parsonage house, which already contained more rooms than he ordinarily used, "though I am unmarried, and shall remain so, and, consequently, have no need of those domestic conveniences, my successor will probably have a family, and might be sadly at a loss for nursery apartments. We must think of posterity, my dear sir."

My father smiled, in his quiet, mournful way—I think I see him now. He had a particularly mournful smile, accompanied with a

tremulous motion of the upper lip. "If every one had as great a regard for posterity as you have, Mr. Temple," he said, "the world would be a happier world than it is." I have often thought of this short conversation since it passed, though, perhaps, there was not much in it to make it worth repeating.

I was saying that Mr. Temple was lavish in his expenditure: but it was mostly in matters quite apart from personal gratification, excepting the gratification of Christian benevolence. Before he came to the parish, it was, as I have been told, a sadly neglected and degraded spot, but in the course of a few years its moral aspect was greatly improved. The poor were employed; the aged and infirm were visited and cared for; the ignorant were instructed. Out of his own private resources Mr. Temple built and endowed a school for poor children, and almshouses for the old and indigent, and was very earnest and unwearying in his endeavours to reclaim those who were "out of the way." As I remember him now, Mr. Temple was the very model of a village pastor, and of him it may be said, "He rests from his labours, and his works do follow him." "When the ear heard him, then it blessed him; and when the eye saw him, it gave witness to him; because he delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him; and he caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. He was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, and a father to the poor."

Between Mr. Temple and my father was a strong sympathy, arising from an identity of purpose; and their friendship lasted till death separated them.

I was very fond of Mr. Temple, though he was so grave, for he used to take me on his knee and talk kindly to me; and when I was old enough to be trusted alone, and was tired of seeking my own amusements, or wanted a change of scene and occupation, I often escaped to the parsonage house, and found my way to the

library, which I had free leave to enter at all hours. I shall have more to say about Mr. Temple and the parsonage house in another chapter.

Another of my father's friends and visitors was aunt Seymour. She was my father's sister, and her home was in London; but she generally spent several weeks of every summer at our country house. She was a gay, fine lady, not at all like my father, either in mind or manners. At least, that was the impression I took of her as a child. She was very kind to me, nevertheless, and used to bring me handsome presents when she came to see us, and to talk to me about the wonderful things that were to be seen in London, till it made me almost discontented with living in the country. But, notwithstanding my aunt Seymour's kindness and liberality, I did not heartily like her; for she found fault with my country education and want of polish, and tried to persuade my father to send me to the fashionable boarding-school where my cousin Clara was receiving her genteel training. I knew, also, that she sometimes rallied my father on his lonely life, and tried to persuade him to marry again. This would have alarmed me if I had not fully believed him to be proof against such sinister advice, for I had an aversion to the idea of a stepmother (a very unjust prejudice, as many a subsequent instance has proved to me); and the very fact that my aunt had dared to hint at such a connexion caused me to regard her as a traitor to my interests. I am not sure, however, that I should have thought this, if it had not been put into my mind by my father's old housekeeper.

My uncle Seymour was a man of business, and did not often come to see us. When he did venture so far from London, it was only for a day or two; and from the time of his arrival to that of his departure, our quiet household was kept in a perpetual turmoil by his bustling impatience. He did not take much notice of me. I suppose I was too little to be worth his attention in those days.

He was not unkind, however, and when he did condescend to speak to me, it was in a cheerful, hearty tone that won my regard. In one particular I liked him better than I liked my aunt, for I heard him say to my father on one occasion, "You are in the right of it, Maitland. Don't marry again: you have got enough to live upon, and enough to spare for your little Ellen, when she wants it; and if you should marry again, you cannot tell what might happen. I don't like second marriages."

This won my heart: I always, after that, looked on uncle Seymour as a true friend. My readers will please to bear in mind that I am writing now of my early impression, and neither applaud nor condemn the opposite counsel of either my uncle or my aunt Seymour.

My cousin Clara was also among the visitors who were always welcomed by my father to his country home, though she gave a world of trouble when she came to see us. Happily for my comfort, this was not often; for Clara had more fashionable friends to visit when she was not at school. Happily, I say, because on the two or three occasions when she favoured us with her company, she saw so much in me to laugh at and despise, that I was made quite miserable. Clara had the advantage of me in age by some two or three years, and this, together with her London experiences, gave her such superiority to her little country cousin, that in her presence I seemed to shrink into utter insignificance.

Another of my father's friends was Mr. Harvey, an old gentleman who lived in the neighbouring town, and occasionally, when the weather was fine, walked over to Fair Holt—this was the name of my father's estate. Mr. Harvey was often accompanied by his wife on these visits. They were a curious couple, but very excellent old folk notwithstanding. Mr. Harvey had been in business, but had some time since retired into private life, and spent most of his time in reading. Mrs. Harvey had been my mother's

friend, and, as such, she and her husband were always welcome at Fair Holt. The lady was an indefatigable knitter, and always brought her work with her: she tried to teach me the art and mystery of stocking-stitch, but she could make little headway, and at last gave up in despair, I believe. As I shall have nothing to say of Mr. and Mrs. Harvey hereafter, I shall only add that they lived to a good old age, gradually becoming more infirm, till they were removed by death from their earthly stage of existence.

I might fill up a few more pages with short notices of some other of our friends and neighbours, but I pass on to matters more immediately concerning myself.

I made mention just now of my education, which my aunt Seymour thought so imperfect. It was on this wise: until I was seven or eight years old, I was principally under the tuition of my own maid, who taught me to read and to sew. I had no fixed times for learning, and was allowed to do pretty nearly as I pleased about lessons; and as I greatly preferred play to anything that had the semblance of work, I am afraid that I did not profit so much as I might have done by Susan's well-meant endeavours to teach me "something useful," as she used to say. However, I did learn to read, and as my progress satisfied my father, I did not conceive that any one besides had a right to find fault.

When I was eight years old, my father wished me to have more regular instruction, and a more competent instructor than Susan; and he engaged a widow lady, who had seen better days, to pay daily visits to Fair Holt, from the neighbouring town.

Mrs. Page was well fitted, I am sure, for the task she had undertaken. She had herself had a good education, and was "apt to teach." She was gentle-mannered and sweet-tempered, but conscientiously firm. Her past trials had been sanctified, in the bringing forth of "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." I soon learned to love my kind and affectionate governess, who equally

soon discovered the defects of my previous want of discipline, and adopted wise methods of remedying what had been wrong, and supplying what was deficient. In the course of time I attained a respectable proficiency in the ordinary branches of female education; and if I did not excel in either of them, it was owing to the dulness of the scholar, and not to the deficiency of the teacher. I shall have to introduce my excellent and judicious governess again, in another chapter of my history. This short notice must suffice here.

It was the want of some particular book of reference which gave me the first introduction to Mr. Temple's library, and, by degrees, I obtained the free access to it of which I have spoken. From Mr. Temple himself I received many valuable lessons in natural philosophy and general history; and from my dear father, who was fond of the study of botany and natural history, I learned much that was worth knowing.

Those were happy days. It is true, I had not the advantage of a mother's watchful, tender care; and I was occasionally reminded of my loss. But, as I have said, my remembrance of my mother was very faint, and I never had had to mourn over neglect and ill-treatment received at the hands of careless hirelings.

Nor did I want for amusements. For though I had no companions of my own age, my father was ingenious in finding out for me continual sources of gratification. He often condescended to join me in my childish sports: we played together on our pleasant meadow; and I have yet, as cherished mementoes of mychildhood, the balls and bats, the battledores and shuttlecocks, and the little kite, which he manufactured for me with his own hands, and with which he himself played for my amusement. We walked together, also, daily; and on a little Shetland pony—a birthday gift from him when I was ten years old, and which he taught me to ride—I used to canter beside him as he rode round his farm.

Then, on winter evenings, we sat together, and he laid aside his own occupations to read to me out of some pleasant and entertaining book; and, summer and winter, before I went to bed, we used to kneel together—my little hands clasped in his—while he prayed for God's blessing to rest on his dear little motherless girl.

Yes, those were pleasant times; but I cannot go on any further with this part of my story. Perhaps it has already been too long.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

ONE day, when I was about fourteen years old, I had run across the meadows to the parsonage, and had penetrated into the library, and was busily looking over a book of botanical plates, for the name of a flower I had just found. I was seated on the floor, with the great book in my lap, and had been repeating, half aloud and unconsciously, the name of the order to which my flower belonged, when I was interrupted and startled by a merry voice close beside me, saying, "You are fond of botany, I should think, little lady."

I was on my feet in a minute, for the voice was a strange one in my ears; and looking around, I saw it proceeded from a youth, whom I had never before seen, and who looked on with an amused, though puzzled expression of countenance, at my visible embarrassment.

"Oh! you have startled me very much," I said. "How came you here, and how long have you been in the room, sir?"

"I am sorry if I have alarmed you, young lady," he replied, gravely. "I did not mean to do it, indeed. I have been in the

room about five minutes, I think, and I came in at the open door. I did not know that I should find any one here."

"Oh! but, sir," I said, eagerly I suppose, "you must not think I came here without leave. Mr. Temple lets me come whenever I like, and—and—my name is Ellen Maitland," I added, with a blush and a curtsey, not knowing what else to say, and wondering who the young stranger could be.

"And my name is Harry Temple," said he, "and Mr. Temple is my uncle. Come, we shall be capital friends, I can see," he added, after a scrutinizing glance; and he smiled so pleasantly at my continued embarrassment, that I began to pluck up courage. "But my uncle did not tell me that I should have the pleasure of a young lady for my fellow student," he added.

"Oh! but, sir," said I, "I do not live at the parsonage. I only run in and out when I please; and Mr. Temple does not teach me; he only lets me ask him any questions I like, and lends me books to read, and—and—is very kind to me, very kind indeed."

I do not know how much further our conference might have taken us, if at that moment Mr. Temple himself had not made his appearance. He shook me kindly by the hand and kissed my cheek, after his usual parental fashion, as he said, "Mrs. Harrison" —this was Mr. Temple's housekeeper—"told me you were here, my love, and I am come to introduce you to Master Harry."

"Oh! we are already introduced to one another, uncle," said the youth, gaily. "Miss Maitland and I have made up our minds to be good friends, haven't we, Ellen?"

I felt rather vexed at this; and yet it was said so good naturedly, and with so much real respect, too, that I could scarcely be offended.

"You must not mind Harry," said Mr. Temple, who saw my awkward blush, and hastened to relieve me. "He is a wild boy,

whom they have sent here to be tamed. You must not let him frighten you away from the parsonage."

Not much more passed then; and when, with Mr. Temple's help, I had found what I wanted, I returned home, wondering who this Harry Temple (as he called himself, and as his uncle called him) could be. I was not long in ignorance in this particular. The next time Mr. Temple came to see my father, he told us that Henry was the orphan son of his elder brother; that he had been some years at school, and was now in the transition state between school and the university, during which period the parsonage would be his home.

"He is a nice, lively lad," said Mr. Temple, "and I have great hopes of his turning out well, though he is heir to a good estate."

I learned, further, from this conversation, that Henry's father had been long dead, and that he was partly under the guardianship of his uncle.

It mattered little to me, I argued, who or what Harry Temple was; but I remember that I felt very much for him when I heard of his being fatherless; and the next time I met him, I had forgotten the slight and temporary offence he had given me by his frank declaration of friendship before we had been ten minutes in each other's company.

Henry Temple was at this time sixteen or seventeen years of age. He was tall and slight, but well formed, and had a fine open countenance, shaded with dark brown hair. He had a merry look, even when he was grave; and when he smiled his whole countenance seemed lighted up with pleasure. He was well informed, for a youth of his age, and, what was more in his favour, he was modest and unassuming.

Of course I did not discover this all at once; but after a time, when we became better acquainted, I could not avoid making some silent observations, and I write *now* what I thought *then*.

Harry—as he always persisted in calling himself, and as he liked to be called—lived two years and more with his uncle at the parsonage, and we used often to see him at Fair Holt; for my father was pleased with his manners, and liked his society. He did not lead an idle life, however; for his uncle wished him to prepare for college, and he studied hard. Nevertheless, it was natural and almost unavoidable that we should be sometimes in each other's society; and though he began by sometimes good naturedly laughing at me for my tremendous knowledge of botany —to use his own expression—he at length declared that he would study botany also, if I would be his teacher. I dare say he was partly in joke and partly in earnest when he said this, but I understood him seriously; and when he came to Fair Holt and said, "Come, Nelly, we must have a botanizing ramble this fine afternoon," I was always ready to accompany him.

If I gave Harry some few lessons in botany, he more than repaid me by helping me out with other and perhaps more important studies, and at one time he seriously proposed to teach me Greek. I had begun to take lessons in Latin from my governess, but Greek frightened me, and I declared I would have nothing to do with that. But though Harry did not teach me Greek, he gave me many lessons in drawing, for he was an excellent artist for one so young.

We sometimes rode together also, accompanied by my father—I on my little Shetland pony, and Harry on a fine riding-horse, which his uncle kept for his use.

And so two years passed pleasantly away.

There was quite a gloom at the parsonage, and at Fair Holt also, when Harry Temple went away. He had grown to a handsome young man; but this was the lowest and least of his qualities. He had endeared himself to his uncle by his affection and docility, and to my father by his frank and open character, and his modesty.

As for myself, I was sorry to lose a pleasant companion, especially as there were no others to take his place.

He left other regrets behind him; for he had gained the respect and gratitude of the poor around by his affability and kindness.

Harry Temple went away, however; and after a little while, though he was greatly missed, affairs went on much as they did before he came—only that we were, all of us, two years older.

Twice, in the succeeding two years, he passed parts of the long vacations at the parsonage. To others he seemed just the same as ever, but to me he was altered. We walked together and rode together, as before; but his intercourse, which had formerly been so free and unconstrained, had thrown over it an air of constraint, and had become ceremonious and polite. I was no longer his "little Nelly," but "Miss Maitland." I rather resented this, and became reserved also.

At the end of these other two years, I ceased to receive my daily lessons; and Mrs. Page came no more, except as a friend and visitor. Gradually I emerged from girlhood into womanhood; and at seventeen years of age I had become the recognised mistress of Fair Holt.

CHAPTER III.

SORROW.

I HAD just entered my nineteenth year, when a heavy and lasting sorrow suddenly fell upon me.

My father complained one evening of feeling unwell, and retired early to his room. I had noticed for some days that he had appeared languid and unrested; but he had made light of my fears, and now he attributed his slight indisposition to the heat of

the summer sun, and some extra exertion he had undergone. He should be well on the morrow, he said.

In the morning, however, he sent for me to his chamber.

"You were a better prophet than I was, Nelly," he said, raising his head from the pillow, and speaking with evident pain; "I have had a very restless night, and have a sad headache this morning. I must indulge myself with two or three hours more bed, Ellen. And draw the curtains closer, dear; the light seems too strong for me."

I drew the curtains closer, and then took my father's hand, and leaned over him to kiss his cheek. Hand and cheek burned with dry, fierce heat.

"This is not a common headache, father," I said, in alarm; and though he still tried to remove my apprehensions, he acquiesced at last in my proposal to send for a doctor.

It was too late. He had struggled too long against the symptoms of approaching danger. Before night he was delirious with pain and fever.

I need not tell how, through that night, and many succeeding nights and days, I watched by his bedside, listening to his feeble moans with dreadful forebodings, and administering the medicines, which he would take from no other hand than mine; nor how our constant, sympathizing friend, Mr. Temple, who, with troubled looks which he could not hide, passed restlessly to and fro between the parsonage and Fair Holt almost every hour in the day, first advised, and then entreated, and at length almost dragged me away from the sick chamber, that I might have a short interval of rest, and insisted on taking my place by his friend's bedside; nor how, when my old governess, Mrs. Page, heard of my father's danger, and my trouble, she hastened to Fair Holt to offer her services; nor how sorrowful our servants were, while they shrunk from approaching the room for fear of the infection; nor how

oracularly the hired nurse delivered her opinion from day to day, and tried to keep up my spirits by predicting my father's speedy recovery—for she had seen worse cases than his, in which the patient did very well at last. I need not, I say, go over these sorrowful details; for the closing scene was still more sorrowful to me.

I have forgotten to say that, at the commencement of my father's illness, I wrote to aunt Seymour, and a few days afterwards she come down by coach to Fair Holt, to see her brother; but this was not much comfort to me, for aunt was so used to being waited on, and so little used to nursing, that she gave more trouble than she saved. Besides, when she came and found that my father's illness was an infectious fever, she was too much alarmed for herself to enter the sick chamber. And then she could say nothing to comfort me, but rather increased my alarm by her own terrors. A few words from kind Mrs. Page, or Mr. Temple, did me more good than all aunt Seymour's abortive attempts at consolation. Indeed, she did not stay long at Fair Holt. She was glad to escape from the danger, I believe; and finding, as she said, that she could not do any good, she returned to London, promising to visit us again when my father would be better.

"I am afraid he never will be better, aunt," I sobbed; but she said that this was nonsense, and that I must not give way to gloomy fancies: and so she left me.

One evening, when she was gone, and my father had been ill more than three weeks, with only a few lucid intervals, Mr. Temple took me aside. There had been a consultation of doctors that day, and Mr. Temple had had a subsequent interview with Mr. Symonds, our own medical attendant. I could see from Mr. Temple's countenance that he was agitated in mind.

"My dear Ellen," he said, "I trust you are able to say from the heart, 'Not my will, but thine, Lord, be done!'"

I think I should have sunk to the ground then, if he had not seen my weakness, and, supporting me, led me to a sofa. I wept bitterly before I could reply, and then it was—"I cannot—I cannot!"

"You cannot in your own strength, but in God's you may be able, dear Ellen. We have a Father in heaven, my love," said Mr. Temple; and as he spoke, tears rolled down his cheeks; "and he bids us trust in him, and teaches those who love him to say, 'Though my father and my mother forsake me—leave me—the Lord will take me up.' Cannot you say and feel this, Ellen?"

"Then there is no hope," I said, passionately; "and you have to tell me that my father is dying;" and I sobbed convulsively.

"I do not say that, Ellen," he replied; "and all hope is not past. But a crisis is approaching——"

"I see it all," I said; "and you mean to say that I must lose my dear, dear father. Oh, what shall I do?"

Mr. Temple gently soothed me; and when I could listen with more composure he told me that a few hours would, in all probability, decide the anxious question whether the sickness were 'unto death,' or whether my father should be restored again to health. "All that can be done by human means has been done, Ellen," he said; "and now, prayer in submission to the Divine will is our only, as it is at all times our best, resource. But you are worn out," he went on, "with anxious watching and sorrow; I will sit with your father through the night: Mr. Symonds, also, will remain at Fair Holt: you must get some repose, and in the morning, it may be, we shall have good tidings to tell."

I resisted this request at first; but, on the promise of Mr. Temple that I should be aroused if any important change took place, I at length retired with a heavy heart.

I tried to pray, but I could not. Rebellious murmurings swelled my heart, and rose to my lips when I would have said,

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." I threw myself despairingly on my bed, and sunk into a troubled slumber.

I woke early in the morning, with that heavy weight on the heart, and wild confusion in the mind which you, reader, have ere now experienced if you have ever fallen asleep under the pressure of overwhelming grief. The sun was shining brightly into my room, and birds were merrily chirping beneath my window. It was some minutes before I could awaken to a full remembrance of the agony of the previous evening; and then, bitterly reproaching myself that I had been able to sleep while my father was perhaps dying, I rushed from the room, and tremblingly glided into his chamber.

He was sleeping heavily, and by his bedside sat our kind friend, Mr. Temple. He looked up pityingly, I thought, as I entered, and then noiselessly rose to meet me.

"There has been no change during the night," he said, "and Mr. Symonds has just returned home. He will look in again presently."

An hour later, my father opened his eyes, and his first glance fell upon me. He stretched out his hand and smiled. Oh, what tumultuous joy throbbed in my heart then! My father's consciousness had returned; and in that smile I saw, as I believed, a presage of his recovery.

Alas! the joy was of short continuance. Before noon I was tenderly admonished to prepare for the now inevitable stroke: my father was, indeed, dying.

Through the afternoon of that never-to-be-forgotten day, I sat by his side, my hands clasped in his, while the cold damp of death already bedewed his forehead. In broken sentences he whispered his last prayers for me, and his last blessings upon me. "God will not leave you comfortless, Ellen," he said; "do not forsake him, and he will not forsake you. He will be the strength of your

heart, and your portion for ever: he is mine. What should I do now, Ellen, if I had not a Saviour to trust in and to lean on? Be of good cheer, my dear, dear child; only trust in him. Kiss me once more—once more, Ellen."

A sudden convulsion interrupted his utterance. Help was at hand, and they raised him that he might breathe more freely. Once he looked at me, and moved his lips as though he would have spoken; and then he fell backwards heavily. My father was dead!

They led me from the room; and of what more passed on that mournful day I have but a slight remembrance.

My kind friends, Mr. Temple and Mrs. Page, relieved me of the painful duties which, at this time, must otherwise have devolved on me. In the course of a day or two, my uncle Seymour also arrived, to give attendance to my father's funeral and the arrangement of his affairs. I must pass over the former event, only saying that we laid him by my mother's side, in the village churchyard.

By my father's will, my uncle had become my sole guardian, until I should be twenty-one years old; and then, of all that he had died possessed, I was to be the untrammelled mistress.

My uncle Seymour was, I have said, a man of business; he was also a man of few words. He was kind, however, to me, his orphan niece, and asked me if I had formed any plans for the future.

"No, I had not," I said, with a heavy sigh and a sad heart.

"You had better return with me to London, then, my dear," he said, "and leave Fair Holt, at least for a time, till the first sharp pain of this bereavement has passed away."

"Oh, do not ask me to leave my home, uncle," I said, imploringly.

"I hope you will make my house your home, Ellen," he replied. "It will be the best plan, I believe, for it will not be proper for you to live here alone. Indeed, I think it will be better to find a tenant for Fair Holt until you are your own mistress. It will take a world of trouble off my hands."

My uncle did not mean it unkindly; but I felt then, that in him I should have a peremptory, though a conscientious guardian. His plan, however, was probably the most judicious that could be devised, and, as Mr. Temple concurred in it, I did not feel that I could resist his wish. Due arrangements were accordingly made; my father's servants were paid off and dismissed—all excepting Susan, my own maid, who was to accompany me to London; the house was, for the present, left in charge of the old housekeeper, under the offered superintendence of Mr. Temple; and two or three weeks after my dear father's funeral I bade a sorrowful farewell to the home and friends of my childhood, and was on the road to London with Susan and my uncle Seymour, who, impatient of the interruption caused to his business by his long absence, had somewhat hurried my departure.

CHAPTER IV.

CHANGES.

LET me do justice to my uncle's family, as well as to myself, by saying that I received a warm and cordial welcome. I had not seen my cousin Clara since she was a girl; and of her manners and temper I had not a very pleasing remembrance. I found her a well-bred young woman; and in the kind sympathy she evinced, I could discover none of that assumption of superiority which had in by-gone days caused me so much uneasiness. My aunt met me

with overflowing kindness: she was evidently deeply affected by the blow which had fallen on us both, but heaviest on me.

My uncle's place of business was in the city, but his family residence was in one of the once fashionable squares in the neighbourhood of Holborn. It was a large house; and some preparations had been made for my permanent abode there.

"You will be absolute mistress here, Ellen," said my aunt, when she had taken me into a small suite of apartments, comprising a comfortable bed-chamber, a dressing-room, and a sitting-room, opening into each other, and all rather richly furnished. "These will be your own dominions; and I hope we shall make it a happy home for you."

I whispered my thanks for the attention which had been directed to my comfort; but I shook my head despondingly when my aunt spoke of future happiness. My sorrow was of too recent a date to allow me to think of *that*.

In the course of a few days, however, a change of scene and occupation had to some extent dulled the sharp edge of my grief. I had enough to do, with Susan's help, in unpacking and arranging the personal property I had sent on from Fair Holt; and though this employment brought to my recollection very vividly my dear father and his uniform kindness, and the delights of the home I had lost, so that my eyes were perpetually full of tears, the very exercise of body and mind was salutary; and before the work had come to an end, I was surprised to find that I was not entirely and irremediably miserable.

The considerate kindness of my aunt and cousin had its influence also in calming my spirits. I should be under no harsh constraint, it seemed, in the house of my guardian. Deference was paid to my wishes, when I expressed any; and I was allowed to occupy myself as I pleased—to associate with my relatives when I chose, always having the retirement of my own apartments when I

preferred solitude, and the services of my own maid always at my command.

I rarely saw my uncle until he returned from the city to our late dinner. He was generally taciturn, like one who had thoughts of his own which occupied his attention, and which he did not choose to reveal. He spoke pleasantly to me, however, when he did address me; and occasionally he unbent and became even talkative.

My aunt and cousin were fond of society; and I was introduced, in due form, to what they called a select circle of friends. I had no reason to complain of my reception, though I could not help suspecting that, had I been a portionless orphan instead of an heiress, I should have received less flattery and adulation.

"It is not worth while to enter into particulars, my dear," my aunt Seymour said privately to me one day, after an old lady had left the drawing-room, and to whom I had replied with unconscious simplicity on being questioned about my dear old home, and the extent of the Fair Holt estate. "You answered pretty well; but there is no occasion to let people know how much or how little we may be worth. It is better to let them form their own ideas from what they see."

I did not, at that time, fully comprehend what my aunt meant; but my cousin afterwards enlightened me; and I then learned that exaggerated ideas of my prospective fortune were entertained by my aunt's friends, and were encouraged, if they had not been instilled, by my aunt herself, as a means of obtaining consideration for me, and probably of influencing my settlement in life. I was vexed at this, at first; but I fear I gradually became reconciled to the deception—at least I did not attempt to remove it.

My uncle Seymour was not an irreligious man, nor was a form of religion wanting in his family. Generally, the day was closed, though not begun, with family devotion; and once, and occasion-

ally twice, on the Sunday, my uncle, aunt, and cousin attended public worship. They were also connected with two or three religious societies. My uncle was on more than one committee of these societies, and my cousin was collector for another of them. And yet I failed to perceive that religion had any stronghold on their affections. There was a painful contrast, indeed, forced on my notice between the strong, deeply-rooted and heart-felt piety which I had witnessed in Mr. Temple and my father, and the apparently formal and external acquiescence yielded to it in —— Square. In the one case, Christianity was loved, was made the foundation of every hope, and the spring of every action; in the other, it was patronized, and made subservient to the caprices and opinions of a fashionable world. The societies I have referred to were supported, I fear, because it was reputable and fashionable to have one's name seen in connection with them; and not solely, at any rate, because in them the glory of God and the eternal well-being of men were sought. The ministry my uncle and his family attended was admired and followed because the place of worship was a fashionable one, and the preacher was popular, rather than with the unfashionable hope and expectation of receiving spiritual benefit from the public services of the house of God.

And I could not find that the religion of my uncle's family, such as it was, had any constraining or counteracting influence on daily life. They were, I fear, essentially of the world—the busy world, the money-loving world, the gay world, the fashionable world; call it by what name you will, or view it under any of its shifting, changeable aspects—the world, the love of which is enmity against God.

Nor did this fashionable religion influence the tempers of my relatives. I soon discovered that, according as my uncle's schemes and transactions in business had been prosperous or otherwise, so was he placable or irritable; and that there were jealousies, heart-

burnings, manœuvrings, and deceptions innumerable constantly at work in the hearts of my aunt and cousin. By each I was in turn made the confidant of schemes or grievances which greatly distressed me; for they proved that, under the mask of smiles and pleasure, all around were full of mistrust and bitter envying.

For a time these discoveries were the greatest drawback to my comfort, for I had no reason to complain of personal neglect or unkindness; but it is astonishing how soon one gets used to what at first appears insupportable. Especially is it sad to think how soon the influence of a mere formal religion is felt by those with whom it comes in contact. In short—and without further enlargement on this part of my history—I soon began to think lightly of what had given me so much uneasiness; and I insensibly sunk into the habits of thought and feeling which I had condemned, and glided down the dull current of religious formality and fashionable pietism into which I had unhappily fallen.

"You have never been to a theatre, I suppose, Ellen?" said my uncle, one day at dinner. He had returned in unusually good spirits from the city.

"No, uncle," I said.

"Of course Ellen has not," said my aunt; "it is not four months since she left Fair Holt, where, you know, she has been shut up and secluded all her life."

The mention of Fair Holt drew tears into my eyes; but by a strong effort I conquered the weakness.

"Well, never mind; we will make up a party to-night, and Ellen will enjoy it the more because of its novelty," said my uncle.

I looked at my cousin, and saw that her countenance brightened up as my uncle said this. I was not surprised at this, for Clara had frequently spoken, with much delight, of their frequent visits to the theatre, and regretted the deprivation of this and other

public amusements which my father's recent death had occasioned.

My cousin looked at me also, with some curiosity, I suppose; for I had expressed myself rather strongly against theatrical amusements.

"You will not get Ellen in the mind to go, papa," said Clara, rather maliciously, I thought; "she thinks it is very sinful to see a play performed."

"Indeed!" said my uncle. "But why should you think so, Ellen?"

I had not expressed myself so strongly as Clara made out; and timidly I said so. But I acknowledged to feeling some reluctance to visiting a theatre, and hoped that my uncle would excuse me from joining the party.

"But if it would be wrong for you to go, it would be wrong for us, you know, Ellen," said my aunt.

"I do not say that it would be wrong, aunt," I replied; "but I know that my dear father had strong objections to the stage; and I have heard Mr. Temple say that it is in many respects objectionable."

"But, my dear niece," said my uncle, "you do not pin your faith on Mr. Temple's sleeve, I hope. He is a good man, I am sure; but from what I have seen of him, I judge he has very narrow views of such matters. Besides, with him, you know, these objections are, in some measure, professional; and though he is not to be blamed exactly for drawing the line too strait, you are not bound to take all he has ever said for gospel."

"But my father thought as Mr. Temple does," I rejoined.

"I do not think that my dear brother ever saw a play performed in his life," said my aunt; "if he had, he would have formed a different opinion of theatres. You know, dear, he lived so retired at Fair Holt that he knew positively nothing of the world."

"A great many good people, professors of religion, and very strictly pious people, and even some ministers, often go to the theatre, Ellen," interposed Clara. She had told me this before, but I had scarcely believed it. "Do they not, papa?" she added, appealing to her father.

"Certainly they do, Clara; and find it a very profitable, instructive recreation. Of course I speak of the legitimate drama—the plays of Shakspeare, and the better modern dramatists. No one of respectability would confound these with the low and vulgar performances of the stage."

"We never stop to see out the farces," subjoined my cousin Clara.

"What is the play for this evening?" asked my aunt; and my uncle gave the desired information.

"Oh! you must go and see it, Ellen," exclaimed my cousin, in ecstasy. "It is a magnificent piece, and the scenery is grand beyond description; and K—— in the leading character is most wonderful: the music, too, is quite thrilling. You must not say another word about not going with us, Ellen."

I did say many words, however; but they were spoken faintly and irresolutely; and I formed one of the party.

My cousin had previously told me that if I went once I should only be too eager to go again. This was very true; but all the while I was conscious that not one objection which I had previously heard raised against the stage was proved by experience to be irrational or invalid; and I feel painfully now, that by this and kindred dissipations, to which I shall not more particularly refer, the religious instructions I had received in my childhood and youth, and the principles I had formerly respected and reverenced, lost their hold on my heart and mind; and that, before long, it might have been plainly seen of me and in me, that I was "a lover of pleasures more than a lover of God."

CHAPTER V.

OLD FRIENDS

I HAD lived in London a year, when one morning a card was put into my hand. It bore the name of "Henry Temple," and the gentleman was waiting in the library, I was told.

Henry Temple, my old companion, and almost playfellow at Fair Holt! I had not quite forgotten him; and his name called up very painful thoughts and feelings in my mind. I remembered my father and our happy home, and my father's friend, Mr. Temple. I had not used him very well. I had promised to write to him often, and he had often written to me; but I had neglected my promise, and for some months I had not sent him a line.

"Shall I say you are engaged, Miss Ellen?" asked Susan, when I sat lost in thought, with the card before me.

"Oh, no; tell Mr. Temple I will step down directly."

When Susan was gone, I glanced almost unconsciously at my image in the glass. "He will scarcely know me, I should think," I said to myself: "I wonder whether he is as much altered as I am."

No, he was not much altered, except that he had grown into manhood. He met me with his old smile, and his frank, cordial manner.

"I thought Miss Maitland would not refuse to see an old friend," he said; "though they did at first seem to doubt whether you were 'at home.'" He laid a peculiar emphasis on the last words.

I blushed painfully, for I knew how Harry had formerly condemned this kind of deception. Moreover, I knew that it was a frequent practice of my aunt and cousin to be "not at home" to

visitors whom they did not wish to receive. They justified this "conventionalism of society," as they called it, but I had never willingly allowed it to be used for me, and I said so.

"And oh, Harry," I said—"Mr. Temple, I mean——"

"Let it be Harry," said he, with a smile; "it does me good to find that you have not forgotten my old familiar name."

"Well, then, Harry—I am so glad to see you; and you must not notice me if I cry a little, for you have put me in mind of the dear old times that are gone for ever."

"They are, indeed," he said; "but, Ellen, I have a message to you from my uncle, and a severe lecture to give you from him," he added, good-humouredly. "He says that you have quite turned him off."

Oh, no, no, I had not done that, I said, eagerly; but I had lately had so much to do, and so forth. My reader, if a young lady, will understand the excuses I found for having neglected the correspondence of an old and grave friend.

"Will you prove that you have not forgotten my uncle," said Henry, "by accepting his invitation? He wants you to pay him a long visit."

This, indeed, was the object of Henry's calling on me; and I learned further from him that he had been spending some weeks at the parsonage, and was now on his way, through London, to his own estate in Sussex. He had left college, and was hesitating whether he should spend a year or two in travelling, or settle down quietly at home with his widowed mother. I need not prolong my account of this interview. I introduced Harry to my aunt and cousins, and he was invited to dine with us. He often called again during the two or three weeks he remained in London; and before he pursued his homeward journey, he had, from some cause or other, determined that he would not leave England. Meanwhile, I had obtained my guardian's consent to spend a few weeks at

Mr. Temple's parsonage, and on the day that I took the journey Harry Temple left London also, going southward.

My kind friend Mr. Temple received me with warm affection; and Mrs. Harrison, his old housekeeper, wept for joy, as she said, when she first saw me. Hers were not the only tears that were shed. A host of tumultuous thoughts and remembrances rushed upon me when I entered the old parsonage, and I was glad to escape to the chamber which had been prepared for me, to hide my emotions. As for Susan, who had accompanied me—the faithful old servant who had been my nursemaid in childhood, and my "lady's maid" in later years—she fairly cried and laughed in the same breath, to find herself again among old scenes, and to see old remembered faces.

I passed the evening of that day with Mr. Temple, in his library—the room with which I had been so familiar in my childhood. The very books ranged in rows on their shelves were old acquaintances; and a great ink-blotch on the carpet reminded me of an accident which had befallen me ten years before, and of the gentleness and good temper of my host.

"I owe you a new carpet for this, sir," I said, pointing to the memento.

"No, Ellen," he replied; "I look upon that blot as a dear friend, because it reminds me of you. I would not part with it on any account."

From the windows of the old-fashioned library could be seen the roof and chimneys of Fair Holt, and the tall, thick trees by which it was belted in, as well as the path through the meadows along which I had so often tripped in by-gone days, The sight made me sad.

Fair Holt had a tenant. My uncle had managed this without much difficulty, and, as he had said, it took a world of trouble off his hands, besides being advantageous to me. And yet the sight

of the old house, together with the thought that I was—for this time, at least—shut out of it, distressed me.

Mr. Temple soon turned the conversation to other topics, however: he led me on to talk of my London history. But, alas! there was much in that which I hesitated to tell. I did not like, for instance, to speak of my frequent visits to the theatre, of meaningless morning visits, or of evening parties from which cards and dancing were not always excluded, and which were sometimes kept up through half the night. Much less could I have found courage and humility (it requires courage to be humble and penitent) to have told him then that I rarely found time for reading the Bible, and that I shrunk from self-examination and secret prayer.

I know not whether my dear old friend was quite satisfied with the hesitating account I gave of myself. He said nothing, however, and began to speak of my father—tenderly, affectionately, and sympathizingly: he told me how he daily missed the frequent intercourse which had formerly given him such pleasure—that the village seemed a different and a sadder place, now that he was gone; but that all this regret was lost in exultation when he remembered—and he never ceased to remember—the glorious "inheritance of the saints in light," the fulness of joy which is at God's right hand, and the pleasures which are for evermore, into which the redeemed and happy spirit of my father had entered.

"Oh, Ellen!" he said, "we do not sorrow as those who have no hope; 'for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.' What should we do, Ellen, without the gospel, which brings to us light, life, and immortality?"

I was too sensibly affected by Mr. Temple's reference to my father to reply; and oh! what could I have said then, but that I had guiltily and madly trifled, and was still trifling, with the hopes and promises of the gospel?

"As for myself," continued Mr. Temple, "it seems to me that it cannot be long before I shall also—to use the words of the psalmist—'go hence, and be no more.'"

"Do not say that, sir," I said. "What shall I do, if all whom I love are to be taken from me?" I was indeed, and not without reason, distressed to hear him speak thus. I had noticed how much my good old friend was changed since I parted from him a year before. He had become pale and infirm, not from years so much as from failing health. Harry had partly prepared me for this; but the alteration was greater than I had expected to find it. His cheerful conversation, indeed, had banished the thought from my mind; but now he himself recalled it.

"But, dear Ellen," he said, in answer to my sorrowful exclamation, "you know that if all our earthly friends die, there is one Friend who lives for ever; and, after all, it will not be an eternal parting, will it? Oh, we must not suffer it to be an eternal parting, Ellen. It need not be. As to myself," he continued, "I hope I am able to say that, at last, I am willing to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. But I did not mean to distress you," he went on; "and I will not speak any more of this now." And then he turned the conversation to the old people in the village whom I had known, and gave me the history of much that had passed around him during the last year. And he did not forget to tell me that my little Shetland pony, of which he had taken charge, was fat and frolicksome.

It was late before we parted that evening, and when I retired to my chamber I had no inclination to lay my head on my pillow. My heart was sad: I almost wished I had not accepted Mr. Temple's invitation. A Bible lay on the dressing-table, and I mechanically opened it; but the first words on which my eyes fell seemed to reproach me for past neglect, and I hastily closed it. At length I sank into an unquiet slumber.

CHAPTER VI.

"AN EXCELLENT CONNEXION" FORMED.

WITH the dawn of the following day came more pleasurable thoughts. The bright sunshine streamed into my chamber, and when I opened the window the cool air fanned my cheek; while the green meadows around, and the woodlands in the distance, with the sparkling river which wound through the valley, refreshed both my eye and my mind. Only those, perhaps, who have been for some time mewed up in a close and crowded city can understand the character of that elasticity produced by a sudden withdrawment into the ever fresh and reviving scenes of nature.

And when I descended from my room, and met my cheerful old friend at the breakfast table, and listened to the well-remembered tones of his voice at family prayer, and afterwards took his arm and walked with him into his garden, I recalled the half-formed wish of the previous night that I had disregarded his invitation. And when subsequently I went into the meadow where Plato, my dear little Shetland pony, was quietly grazing—fat and flourishing, as Mr. Temple had told me—and saw him prick up his ears at the sound of my voice, and then trot towards me, to rub his short, dumpy nose into my hands as he had been wont to do, in search of a cake or an apple, it was as much as I could do to keep my gratification within bounds.

I will not linger, however, over this part of my history. Let it suffice to say that much that was pleasant, mingled with some things which were painful, varied this summer visit to the scenes of my childhood. I renewed my friendship with my old teacher, Mrs. Page, and sought out my father's old servants—or rather,

Susan did this for me. I went round the village, and looked in at the almshouses and the school, and was pleased that there were many among the young and old who had not forgotten me. I rode out on my Shetland pony, and walked out with Mr. Temple through the fields and along the shady by-paths I had trodden when a child. I visited my father's and my mother's graves, and wept bitterly there. I was invited to Fair Holt; but my heart failed me. If it had remained deserted, I could have wandered alone over its desolate chambers, dismantled rooms, and neglected garden; and might have found some of "the joy of grief," perhaps, in a free indulgence of it. It might, too, have been beneficial to me. But I could not bear to see it gay and cheerful, inhabited by strangers; so I never ventured nearer to Fair Holt than the entrance gate to the large meadow.

I had been a month at the parsonage; and the quiet life seemed to exert a salutary influence over my soul. There were times, indeed, when I could almost have unburdened my mind and revealed my causes of dissatisfaction to my kind friend; but my heart failed me.

I received a letter from my cousin Clara, which, it may be, also helped to turn the current of my thought into another channel. It contained news of her approaching nuptials. Her hand had been sought and won, it seemed, with some rapidity, for the wedding was to take place within a few weeks' space; and she besought my return to London as her bridesmaid.

I was surprised at the news and the request, and yet more astounded when she named the bridegroom-elect. He was a gay man of the world, whom I had occasionally met at my uncle's table, and concerning whom my cousin had often expressed herself with repugnance. He was, also, nearly double Clara's age.

"Is it possible," I said to myself, "that my uncle and aunt Seymour can have given their consent to such a match?"

Yes, it was not only possible, but certain; for, inclosed in Clara's letter was a note from my aunt, endorsing her request, and expressing satisfaction with her daughter's choice. "To be sure," she wrote, apologetically, "there is some disparity in age, and Mr. Colvin has been rather wild in his young days, as I daresay you may have heard, Ellen. Indeed, I think I have said as much to you; but he is quite steady now, and I have no doubt will make a good husband for Clara; and it is *an excellent connexion.*"

CHAPTER VII.

MORE CHANGES, AND ANOTHER "EXCELLENT CONNEXION."

THE time allotted for my visit to Mr. Temple was within two or three weeks of its close, when one evening we were greatly surprised by the sudden and unannounced appearance of Henry Temple. I do not know what reasons he gave to his uncle for paying another and an unexpected visit to the parsonage; but, whatever they were, he was welcomed very warmly, and it seemed as though he did not intend to beat a speedy retreat.

For my own part, I had no idea, at that time, that I had anything to do with Harry's erratic movements. I did not suppose that he had any thought of me, except as his former childish companion; and I am sure I had never thought of him in any more intimate relationship. I liked him, however; and without hesitation I accepted his invitations to resume our botanizing expeditions. But, after a few days, I could but notice, not only that he was very stupid about plants and flowers, but that he generally turned the conversation to my recent way of life in London, and seemed wonderfully inquisitive about my present tastes and pursuits. He was communicative in his turn—more

communicative, indeed, than I had chosen to be. He described his house in Sussex, told me how he intended to employ his time when he was "regularly settled down," and spoke enthusiastically of his mother, whom he evidently reverenced and admired as one of the best of womankind, and wished that I knew her.

After he had once or twice renewed these subjects, I began to think that Henry Temple was getting dull and prosy, till at length the suspicion dawned upon me that he had a motive in these disclosures and wishes. But if he had, he did not reveal it; and, at length, my visit came to an end.

I shall never, while I live, forget the last evening I passed with my dear old friend at the parsonage. His ordinary cheerfulness seemed to have forsaken him; he was unusually serious, and even solemn.

"We may never meet again, my dear child," he said, taking my hand in his, and speaking tremulously. "I have not yet come to that time of life when the grasshopper becomes a burden, and in which there is no pleasure; but, nevertheless, I feel that 'the silver cord' is being loosed, and 'the golden bowl' will soon be broken. My Master has not much more work for me to do on earth, Ellen; and I thank God, through Jesus Christ, that I can hear his summons to depart without dread. And you, Ellen, have perhaps a long, and I trust a happy and useful life before you; but it will be none the less happy and prosperous for an old friend's blessing and prayers. Let us kneel together for the last time, my dear Ellen." And in fervent, earnest supplications, as we knelt together in the old library, he poured out his soul for me, entreating that God would bless me indeed—that he would preserve me from temptation, guide me in every doubtful and perplexing step, give me strength to perform aright the duties of life, and grace to love and serve him all my days.

And thus our last conversation closed.

I cannot say, certainly, that Mr. Temple had observed in me anything that gave him uneasiness; nor am I sure that he had fathomed Harry's thoughts respecting me. I believe, however, that he had; and that his anxiety for us both found expression in prayer when he would have felt it impossible to have offered advice, or caution, or warning, in other words.

For the time I was deeply affected. I hastened to my chamber, and there, in agitation of mind, made many resolutions. But, alas! like the morning cloud and early dew, they passed away.

On my arrival in London, I found, as I expected, my aunt and cousin in full and feverish preparation for Clara's wedding. Let me lightly pass over this event; there was nothing in it worthy of record. It was, looking at it as a matter of worldly policy, "an excellent connexion," as aunt Seymour had spoken, and continued to speak of it. Mr. Colvin was a rich man. His father had been a merchant, had amassed large property, had retired from commerce, and bequeathed his fortune unimpaired to his only son, who, when he had spent more than half the ordinary period of existence in affluence, luxury, idleness, and dissipation, bethought himself that it was high time to marry. As an old business connexion of his father, he had kept up an acquaintance with my uncle Seymour, and, when but little expected, he had made an offer to Clara.

Poor Clara had not much reason to respect the man whom she had promised to marry; but the offer dazzled her, and she fancied that she could love him.

And so they were married. It was a grand day at —— Square. My uncle Seymour was in high spirits, and one of his gayest humours; and we were all of us too busy and too much excited to be thoughtful. Clara paled and trembled a little while the ceremony was progressing; but she soon recovered her composure, and thenceforth was Mrs. Colvin. The husband had the air of a

man jaded with the world; but he was polite, and apparently well pleased with himself and all around him; for no expense had been spared to give due *éclat* to the wedding.

The honeymoon was passed away at Clifton; and then we returned to Clara's future home near London. It was a large house, magnificently furnished, and Mr. Colvin was proud of it. He was evidently proud of his new and pretty wife, also; and in the constant succession of visits received and returned, and entertainments given in honour of the alliance, and from which there seemed no escape for me, I soon lost the salutary impressions which my quiet visit to my old friend's country parsonage had temporarily revived.

If there was little manifestation of heart piety in the family and household of my uncle Seymour, there was, at least, some outward respect paid, as I have said, to a profession of religion. In the house of Mr. Colvin this respect was exchanged for utter disregard of its very forms. And yet my aunt had spoken of Clara's marriage with an avowed contemner of Christianity as an "excellent connexion!"

The amusements and fashionable occupations of the gay world are often spoken of as "a whirlpool;" and perhaps no single word can more correctly describe them. At first the hapless bark is drawn almost imperceptibly into the deceitful current, and seems to labour slowly and reluctantly in its giddy course; but soon the attraction is fearfully increased, the doomed vessel more swiftly revolves round the depressed and foaming centre, till all control of its movements is lost, and every attempt to escape destruction is futile. Thus, to some degree at least, was it with me in the house of my cousin. It was well for me that an Almighty arm was eventually stretched out to rescue me from the perilous delirium and frenzy of folly into which I had suffered myself to be drawn.

I had not yet returned to my uncle Seymour's house when a letter, deeply edged with black, reached me by post. My hand trembled as I opened it; and it was as I feared—my kind friend, Mr. Temple, was dead. The letter was written by Henry, in evident distress; and it contained little besides the mournful intelligence, only that on his return, through London, he hoped he might have permission to call on me in —— Square.

The sorrowful news gave me a sufficient reason for withdrawing from the gay society at my cousin's, and for returning to the house which was still my home.

It is not enough to say that I deeply regretted the death of my early friend. I was struck with remorse. Mr. Temple's kindness and affection for me had been unceasingly displayed, and I loved him with a childlike love. And yet how had I disregarded his advice and cautions, and even treated his letters with criminal neglect! And what influence had his instructions had upon me? Conscience accused me.

Henry Temple paid his promised visit, and he was accompanied by his mother. They remained some weeks in London, for Henry had business to settle connected with his uncle's will. They often called at —— Square; and it would have been affectation in me to have pretended ignorance of Henry's state of mind towards myself. At length he took courage to ask me to become his wife, and I did not refuse, for I felt that I could safely trust my happiness to his keeping. Could I promise myself that it was in my power to promote his happiness? I would not suffer myself to doubt it; and yet I might have doubted, for there were some points on which we widely differed, and I ought to have questioned whether the fondness I had acquired for the dissipations of society, and which Henry positively disliked, would fit me for the calm domestic life to which he looked forward with such delight.

But I would not think of this. I was proud of my friend, and

believed that I could adapt myself to his tastes, or that I could prevail upon him to adapt himself to mine. Let me add, too, that the distress I had so recently felt at the loss of his uncle, had somewhat sobered me, and withdrawn me temporarily from the more frivolous occupations which had obtained such a hold on my affections.

There was one disqualification, however, which did not enter into my calculations. I shall refer to this hereafter. Meanwhile, I was congratulated on the "conquest" I had made. My aunt Seymour was loud in her approbation of my intended husband. She had spoken of Clara's marriage as being "an excellent connexion," and now the phrase was constantly repeated.

"But there is one thing you must positively manage, Ellen," she said, one day when we were alone, and had been talking of my approaching espousals—"I mean about Mrs. Temple—Henry's mother. What do you think of her, Ellen?"

I liked her very much, I replied; she seemed such a nice, quiet, comfortable lady, and was so fond of Henry.

"All this is very true, my dear," said my aunt; "but yet I do not like the idea of your having a mother-in-law always at your elbow. You must use your influence with your husband to make some other arrangement. When you are married and settled down, you will find it very inconvenient to have two mistresses at Temple Court."

"But, aunt," I said, "you know how fond Henry is of his mother, and that he has said, from the very first, that though Temple Court belongs to him, he would consent to live there only on condition that it should always be her home. And it does not seem right to wish Mrs. Temple to be turned out of her old home, to make room for a stranger. Besides, you know, aunt, I have quite agreed to Harry's proposal; and it is settled among us all that Temple Court is large enough to hold two Mrs. Temples."

"How very absurdly you talk, Ellen," replied my aunt; "and you use such an odd expression! Of course, dear, you would not wish Mr. Temple to turn his mother out of house and home. Nobody could wish that, and I am sure I did not hint at such a thing. But if she could be induced to think that it would be more comfortable for all parties to live in that very pretty cottage that Henry talks about, and that belongs to her——"

"Henry would call this a 'turning out,' aunt," I argued; "and I am sure he would never agree to it. It is not as though Mrs. Temple's cottage was near Temple Court—it is ten miles off, aunt."

"Well, my dear, and ten miles is not so very far off. You may depend on it that I am right; for as to Temple Court being large enough for two mistresses, you will find that to be quite a mistake. You have no idea how many disagreeable things there will be connected with it. The servants will not know who they are to look to for orders, and will be sure to make it an excuse for being negligent; and then, if any little difference of opinion should arise between you and Henry's mother, he will, as likely as not, wish you to yield to her authority; and, at any rate, there will be always a danger of his setting his mother up as an example for you, and you know how unpleasant that would be. And there will be little matters every day to bring you fresh annoyances. Why, even your letters, you know, must be directed to 'Mrs. Temple, Junior,' or they will fall into the hands of your mother-in-law. In short, you will find that she will be the real, and you only the nominal, mistress in your husband's own house. You may rely upon it, it will not do."

"But what can I do, aunt?" I asked in some alarm, for I confess I was a little startled by the vision my aunt had conjured up to frighten me. I remembered having read, in some book of eastern travels, that it is the custom among the Turks, I think, for

the mother-in-law to be recognised as the mistress of her son's household and family, and that the poor wife or wives have a shocking time of it, in consequence. I had never made this application of the statement before, but now I did make it.

"You must not do anything rashly, Ellen," aunt Seymour rejoined, "and you must not, by any means, seem to wish old Mrs. Temple away. But you must contrive to make her think how much more pleasant it would be for her to have a house of her own, and so get her to make the proposal to Henry. Why, bless you, Ellen, a wife can carry almost any point she likes, if she is but discreet, and sets about it in the right way and at the right time. I should never have got on at all with your uncle if I had not found out the way to manage him; for you must have seen how dreadfully obstinate he is when he takes anything into his head. You know that, don't you, Ellen?"

I acknowledged that perhaps my uncle was at times rather "firm."

"Now, how can you flatter Mr. Seymour so, Ellen?" asked my aunt, laughing at the hesitating qualification of her stronger term of reprobation. "Firm, indeed! Oh, but he is nothing short of obstinate; and you must have seen that perpetually. He has got a notion, too, that his will ought to be law; and, by the way, my dear, do you not think that Mr. Temple has a little of that sort of —well, I won't call it obstinacy, but *firmness*, as you say, in his composition?"

"Dear aunt, how can you say so?" I exclaimed. "I do not think he is at all like"—like my uncle, I was about to say; but I stopped short. "I mean, that I have never seen anything like what you call obstinacy in Henry."

"Ah, well; but you are not married yet, Ellen; and a lover is sometimes very different from a husband; and you will see by and by that, like most of them, he will have an opinion of his own."

"I hope so, aunt," I said.

"Of course, my dear; but you know what I mean. However, I was speaking of *my* husband, and not of Mr. Temple; and let me tell you, as a great secret, that the only way to deal with him is to let him fancy that he always has his own way. So, if I want anything very particular, I take care to let the proposal come from him; and that is easily enough managed. And then, to make it more certain, it is a good thing to throw in a little gentle, innocent opposition; and you cannot conceive how this quickens the gentleman's eagerness to carry out his own plans, as he is simple enough to think them. There, my dear Ellen, you have my recipe for ruling a husband; and a word to the wise, you know, is enough."

The conversation ended here, for we were interrupted by the entrance of Henry and his mother; and I could but notice how cordially my aunt received Mrs. Temple. As for myself, I felt depressed, though I knew not why. I was not aware then, that the first seeds of mistrust had been sown in my heart, which were thereafter to produce bitter fruits.

CHAPTER VIII.

EARLY MARRIED LIFE.

We were married. Henry's mother had taken leave of us on our wedding-day, and had returned to Temple Court to prepare for our reception. Our wedding tour was over, and we were on our journey homeward—had reached our journey's end.

"And this is Temple Court, Harry?"

"This is Temple Court, dear Ellen; and I trust it will be a happy home for us." And as he spoke the carriage stopped, and Harry sprang out to assist me in descending.

Mrs. Temple was standing on the doorsteps to meet us, and, warmly embracing me, with tears and smiles she bade me welcome as her own dear child, and as the future mistress of Temple Court.

Its future mistress! My aunt's emphatic predictions and warnings came into my mind then; and a spark of jealousy shot through my heart when I saw, or fancied that I saw, Henry's attention momentarily diverted from me—his wife—to his mother. But I strove to banish the uncomfortable feeling, and for the time succeeded.

The bells of the village church were ringing a merry peal; and a group of cottagers, my husband's tenants, clustered on the green lawn in front of the house, echoed the welcome with joyous shouts.

Tremblingly, and leaning on my husband's arm, I ascended the steps, when a shower of fresh rose leaves unexpectedly fell on us from the balcony above. A smile passed over Harry's face as he saw that I was slightly startled. "I hope that all your troubles here will be as light, and soft, and sweet as rose leaves, my dear little wife," he said.

I was tired, and, though I knew not why, I was dispirited. Perhaps it was that all the faces around me were strange, excepting those of my husband and his mother, and my old Susan, who still adhered to me. Or, rather, was it not that I was entering on a new scene and new duties, unaided by the heavenly strength and wisdom which I had so feebly and waveringly, and therefore ineffectually, sought?

Harry was anxious to show me my new home; and we walked out together the next morning. Temple Court surpassed my expectations: it was a fine old house; and the gardens, in which my husband delighted, were extensive and in beautiful cultivation. The country around was very lovely; and in the fresh air and

sunshine, with Harry by my side, I began to breathe more freely. A weight, for the time, seemed removed from my spirits.

Close by the gardens was an ornamental meadow, and there was Plato, my old Shetland pony. Harry had taken care of him after the death of his former protector, and had caused him to be transported to Temple Court. The sight brought Fair Holt and my father, the parsonage and old Mr. Temple, to my remembrance; and when, at the sound of my voice, Plato pricked up his ears and came sniffing towards me, I could have fallen on his neck and wept. But I did not, for my husband was at my side.

As I have mentioned Fair Holt, I may as well say here, that it still remained tenanted. It was mine, however, for Harry had desired that the little estate on which I was born, and which was endeared to me as my childhood's home, should not be alienated from me by marriage. Fair Holt was my own, therefore, under the trusteeship of my uncle Seymour, who, previous to my marriage, had honourably settled the accounts of his expired guardianship.

That day, and many succeeding days and weeks, passed away tranquilly, and, as I became less a stranger in my new home, my spirits revived. In becoming my husband, Harry had not ceased to be my lover. No reasonable desire of mine was permitted to go ungratified; and our walks and rides were daily more and more extended, till the neighbourhood of Temple Court was no longer strange to me. It gratified my pride in my husband, too, to find how much he was respected, and how, in many particulars, he resembled my old friend of the parsonage—I mean in his plans of usefulness and benevolence.

At home, I could but see and acknowledge that every delicate attention was paid to my comfort, and that my authority, as Henry's wife and the mistress of Temple Court, was undisputed. As Harry had said before we were married, Temple Court was large enough to contain two Mrs. Temples; and Henry's mother evidently

studied how she might, without compromising her own dignity, give due honour to the chosen one of her son. She gave up to me the active superintendence of the household, and the seat of honour at the table; and, at other times, she retired to her own apartments, evidently avoiding imposing the restraint of her presence on the free and social intercourse of husband and wife. I can think of all this now, and remember much more that it would have been for my happiness to have observed then. But I was young, and, alas! ignorant and thoughtless.

I have said, in a former page of my history, that I had one disqualification for a wife, of which I was not then aware. I must call back the expression, and write in its stead—two disqualifications. The first was self-will. Do you say, reader, that if this be a disqualification for a happy union, there are few of either sex who are not thus disqualified? It may be so; but in my heart there was, though latent, a double portion of this weakness and folly. I had never known maternal control: my father had been too tender and indulgent to impose on me the needful restraints of childhood. The old servants at Fair Holt had humoured me as a petted child; and even my kind governess, and my good old friend, Mr. Temple, had failed to perceive how much I was under the influence of selfish emotions. My self-will had never been put to a severe test; and therefore it had remained so long undiscovered and unsuspected. I had, as a child, no companions of my own age and sex to round down by constant attrition the angularities of this disposition; and even in my uncle's house—when past the age of childhood—I was under no judicious counteracting influence. Wonder not therefore, dear reader, when I say that, almost unsuspected by myself, self-will had "grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength."

The other, and a kindred disqualification, was an extreme jealousy of the affections of those I loved, and a constant appre-

hension of losing their esteem by sharing it with others. As a child, I had no one to come between me and my father's regards; and I could not understand how true love could be indefinitely expanded without being weakened.

Let me acknowledge another weakness which, if not a disqualification, was at least a drawback to happiness, and the prolific source of much future discomfort. I was particularly sensitive respecting what I considered my rights. I have said that at an early age I had become the undisputed mistress of Fair Holt, in all that related to its domestic rule; and I have done my aunt Seymour only justice in acknowledging that my "rights" were never invaded by her. It may be that she was aware of this weakness in my character, when she aroused my fears that I should sustain only a secondary importance in my husband's family. At all events, she had touched upon a spring which, even at that time, jarred discordantly.

But I will not weary you, reader, with any further reflection; for my story is yet untold.

Many weeks, as I have said, passed away tranquilly; yet not so tranquilly that some shadows and foreshadows did not fall upon my mind darkly. Thus, though it gave me unmingled delight to hear my husband's praises, and to see the respect paid him by his neighbours and dependants, I soon became weary of hearing about "good Mrs. Temple."

One day, in the absence of Harry, whom business had called a few miles from home, I walked into the village, attended by my old Susan, and was suddenly surprised by a heavy shower. We took shelter in the nearest cottage, where we found only a middle-aged woman, who bustled about with alacrity for our accommodation.

The good woman was very communicative; and she would persist, first of all, in calling me "Miss;" and when Susan inter-

rupted her with the assurance that I was Mrs. Temple, she begged my pardon for being so rude, but it seemed so strange to her that there should be another Mrs. Temple at Temple Court while "the good old lady" was alive, that she did not know how to call me "Ma'am," she said; "and you so young-looking too," she added.

"Why," said Susan, who was as jealous as myself of anything touching my dignity, "you would not have had Mr. Temple marry a lady as old-looking as his mother, would you?"

"Oh dear no, bless his dear heart!" exclaimed the poor woman; "but it seems so odd that Master Harry, as I always call him, should be married at all, and the dear old lady, that has been mistress at Temple Court so many years—almost before I was born—to be turned out of her place, like."

"I do not know what you mean, good woman," said I, rather indignantly; "I did not know when I married Mr. Temple that I was turning any one out of place."

The woman saw that I was offended, though probably she did not know what she had said to give offence. She asked pardon again, however; and if I had had a spark of wisdom or prudence, I should have turned the conversation into another channel; but I was vexed, and my jealousy and self-will had been excited.

"You should not speak of my having turned Mr. Temple's mother out of her place," I said, "because your common sense must tell you that this must be offensive; and besides, it is not at all true. Mr. Temple's mother"—I would not call her "Mrs. Temple"—"as I dare say you know, is living at Temple Court, and is as much mistress there as she wishes to be."

"Ah, dear old lady!" persisted the woman; "she never has any thought for herself, so long as she can make anybody else happy. And I am sure I wish you joy, Miss—young Mrs. Temple I mean—and many long years of comfort with Master Harry for your good husband."

"It seems to me, however," said I, more and more annoyed, "as though you thought Master Harry—as you call him—would have done better not to have been married at all."

No, she did not mean that, said she, and she was sure—at least, she hoped—that I should be every bit as good a mistress at Temple Court as ever the dear old lady had been; and that, she added, was saying a good deal; for a better lady than Mrs. Temple there could not be, if the whole world was searched, over and over. "And Mrs. Temple is not going to leave Temple Court, then?" she asked, inquisitively certainly, and, as I thought, impertinently.

"This lady is Mrs. Temple," said Susan, in a low tone, but emphatically, pointing to me.

"But the old lady is Mrs. Temple, too, isn't she?" demanded the woman, turning short and sharply, as it seemed, to my maid.

I hastened to put a stop to this.

"Mrs. Temple is not going to leave Temple Court, unless she chooses to do so," I said.

She was glad to hear it; and she began to speak more cordially to me after that; for the dear good lady would be terribly missed if she did go; and she was afraid, from something she had heard, that she was going. And then she spoke enthusiastically of the ways my husband's mother had of doing good to all around her, till I was heartily tired of the theme.

Happily, the shower ceased, and I hurried away from the cottage.

"This is a very impudent woman, I know," said Susan, as we walked homewards; "I should not darken her doors again, if it rained ever so hard, I am sure."

I could not speak; my heart was too full of offended pride, though what there had been really to mind, it would have been hard to say, perhaps; and I had no sooner reached home than I hastened to my room, and gave vent to my feelings in a flood of tears.

CHAPTER IX.

EARLY MARRIED LIFE—CONTINUED.

THE incident narrated in the preceding chapter was but one of many similar vexations and mortifications. For instance, after the first ceremonious visits were over, our quiet at Temple Court was not often disturbed; but when any neighbours favoured us with a morning call, it was plain that the visit was intended more for my husband's mother than for my husband's wife. I was treated with politeness, indeed; but the friendship was for another.

Even the servants at Temple Court, though they paid me all respect, did not choose to forget, as it seemed, that they owed superior allegiance to their former mistress, who, however she might voluntarily retire from the active management of her son's domestic affairs, could not prevent the comparisons they were pleased to draw, and not always in my favour. It is true, I should have heard and known nothing of this but for Susan, who was far too sensitive where my fancied honour was concerned, and much too communicative also, for my happiness and comfort. It was Susan who repeated to me the light and frivolous speeches made in the servants' hall; and instead of reproving, I tacitly encouraged a habit so likely to be destructive of daily peace and domestic confidence.

At times, indeed, and notwithstanding all the precautions taken by my husband and his mother to avoid even the appearance of a clashing of interests and feelings, I was brought into personal collision with our servants in matters affecting, as I supposed, my authority as the mistress of the establishment. And when once a spirit of petty jealousy is harboured, it is astonishing how small a

matter will kindle it into a flame. "The mother of mischief," says the proverb, "is no bigger than a midge's wing."

Harry drank toast-water at dinner, and had happened to praise some which I had once made for him before we were married. Two or three months after our return to Temple Court, he complained that his favourite beverage did not seem so enjoyable as formerly; and, to gratify him, I promised to superintend the next day's manufacture: I went into the kitchen, accordingly, and made it after my own fashion. It was excellent, Harry said; but I must not perform a servant's duty for him. Would I tell the cook how I had managed to make his toast-water so much more drinkable?

I sent a message to the cook by Susan, on the following day. "Tell Sarah that if she toasts the bread slowly, and pours the water on it when it is completely brown and crisp," and so on. Susan returned, looking very red and indignant. "Sarah says that she does not need to be taught her business," she said; "and that she has made toast-water for Mr. Temple without having any fault found, for years and years before he was married; and that she makes it just as she used to be told to do it by old Mrs. Temple; but she supposes it is, 'New ladies, new laws.'"

"Was that really what she said, Susan?" I asked, angrily.

"Yes, every word of it," said Susan; "though perhaps she did not wish to have it all repeated; and she said more, too. She said she was tired of having two mistresses; one telling her one thing one day, and the other another thing the next."

"Sarah can leave her situation if she is tired of it," I said; "and you had better tell her so, Susan."

Susan was nothing loth to do this; and before the day was over, Sarah had "given warning" to leave Temple Court.

My husband was evidently vexed when he heard it. She was an old servant, and a favourite with Henry's mother. "We must prevail on her to stay, Ellen," he said; "that is, if you will over-

look her improper behaviour for once; and I will take care she does not offend in like manner again."

I felt vexed at this.

"For my mother's sake, dear Ellen," he pleaded.

"You must take it in your own hands, then, Harry," I said; and then my aunt's prediction came again into my mind; and I added, rather petulantly, "I ought to have some authority, at least, over the servants."

"Of course you ought, dear Ellen; you ought to have not only some, but full and entire authority; and if you wish Sarah to go ——"

"Oh no; do as you please about it, Henry," I said; "but I cannot ask her to stop: and if she does, it must be understood that she is your mother's servant, and not mine."

"That settles the point at once, dear Ellen," said my husband; "for she cannot be allowed to remain on such terms." I could see that Harry was disturbed; but his countenance soon cleared. "We won't say any more about it, Ellen," he said, cheerfully. "I would not, on any account, interfere against your wishes; Sarah had better leave, as she has given warning."

It did not suit Sarah's purpose to leave, however; and the next day, a humble apology was offered through the medium of Henry's mother. I ungraciously accepted it; for I thought my "rights" had been invaded, and my authority contemned; and when Susan remarked that it was plain there were to be two mistresses, after all, at Temple Court, something very like rebellion was stirring in my soul.

And then, at all times, Harry was so solicitous for his mother's happiness, and she was so fond of her "dear boy," as she called my husband, that after the novelty of my position was gone by, my jealousy was kept continually on the alert. If Henry, for instance, ever sat for an hour with his mother in her own parlour, I fancied

it to be treason against my exclusive property in him. And when they met in the morning, or parted at night, the warmth of their mutual expressions excited my jealousy.

Other causes of foolish and criminal rivalry and suspicion, moreover, were not wanting. One day, not very long after marriage, Henry proposed a drive to a neighbouring town. "My mother has an errand there," he said; "and as the day is so fine, you will enjoy the drive."

I answered pettishly that I would rather stay at home. I had something to do which I did not wish to put off.

"Cannot you manage to postpone your important business till to-morrow?" asked my husband, pleasantly.

"No, not conveniently. Besides," I added, "you know there is not room for three in the chaise without crowding."

"No; I did not know it, indeed," said Harry, more gravely: "I was not at all aware of it. Is that a recent discovery, dear Ellen?"

"You must have seen that it is not very comfortable, Henry," I replied; "and if there were more room, I think that three in a chaise is always one too many. I know that your mother likes to have you to herself when she goes out; and so you had better leave me at home."

"Dear Ellen," said my husband, eagerly, "how can you take such a strange fancy into your head?" (Alas! it was not in my head, but in my heart.) "Why, half the pleasure will be lost to my mother if she has to go without your company," he added; "and there is nothing will grieve her more than to know that you think so unkindly of her."

Much more my husband said than I can now repeat, to induce me to change my determination; but I was obdurate.

"Well, Ellen," said Harry, with more irritation of voice and manner than I had ever before witnessed in him, "I hoped I had

more influence over you; but," he continued, gently and soothingly, "you are not quite well, Ellen, and I will not say any more. To-morrow you will smile when you think of this discussion;" and he left the breakfast room.

An hour later, and I heard the wheels of the chaise rolling away from the hall door. The sound roused me from a painful reverie, and I hastened to my room with a wounded heart.

"Harry might have come to say good-bye," I said to myself: "but it is plain that aunt Seymour was right;" and if my husband's charitable excuse for me that I was unwell had been previously without foundation, it was no longer incorrect: my head began to ache violently.

Shortly afterwards I heard a light step bounding up the stairs, and Henry entered the room.

"Harry! why, I thought you were gone."

"But I am not, you see, Ellen love:" and he sat down by my side.

"I heard the chaise, did I not?" I asked.

"Yes, my dear; my mother is gone to ——, because she could not delay her business there; but James is driving. I could not think of leaving you at home alone, dear Ellen."

My conscience smote me for a moment, for I felt my self-will and jealousy rebuked; but my foolish pride was gratified; and I exulted in the thought that I could so easily hold my husband's actions under control. Alas! I did not know then how slender and frail is any bond of affection which is not strengthened by reason and religion; and that in the daily intercourse of married life, *it is the obedient, and yielding, and self-denying wife, who best and most effectually commands her husband.*

I was not satisfied with the conquest I had obtained over my husband's inclinations and wishes, however. A few weeks later, I pushed it to an argument. I had been reading some book, in

HENRY'S UNEXPECTED RETURN

which a curious and somewhat intricate question was started, to the following effect:—"Supposing a man and his wife and his mother were exposed to imminent peril—a shipwreck, for instance, or a fire—and the man had it in his power to rescue one, and only one, of his companions in danger, which should he save, his mother or his wife?" I turned the page down at the passage, and that same day I read it to Harry.

"How should you answer the question, Harry?" I asked.

"I should not feel disposed to answer it at all, Ellen," said he.

"Well, but if you were obliged to answer it?"

"Do you mean if I were put to the question in the old-fashioned way—by torture?" he asked, laughing.

"No, nonsense, Henry, I do not mean that, of course: but if you were obliged to come to a decision on that point, I wonder what it would be."

"I do not see that there would be any necessity for coming to a decision at all, Ellen," he said.

"Yes there would, Harry, if you were placed in such circumstances," I persisted.

"Just in what circumstances, dear Ellen?"

"Why, Harry, how dull you are! I mean, of course, if your mother and your wife were——"

"Would it not be better not to suppose such a case at all, my love?" he asked, mildly. "I trust there is very little probability of my being placed in so painful a dilemma."

"You think it would be a dilemma, then, Harry?" I went on.

"Yes, Ellen, it would be—of course it would; but, as I said, there is, I hope, little probability——"

"But there is a possibility: you will acknowledge that, Henry?" said I.

"A possibility of many things, which it would be extremely foolish to speculate on beforehand, I admit, dear Ellen," said he; "but even in a case of extreme danger, such as the question in the

book suggests, it would be impossible to say certainly that only one of two could be preserved."

"But, Harry dear ——"

"But, Ellen dear, surely this is an unprofitable subject."

I would not acknowledge that it was unprofitable, and persisted in urging my husband to say whether a man ought to think first of his mother or of his wife.

"Perhaps that might depend," he said, playfully, "on what sort of a mother and wife they were."

But no, I would not allow that; it was begging the question. It was useless, however, for Harry would not argue any longer; and he at length distinctly refused to reply to the question I had raised. Will you believe me, reader, to have been so inconceivably weak and foolish as to ground upon this conversation a plea for self-torment? It was evident that Harry thought more of his mother than of me—loved her better than he loved his own wife!

I have said enough to show how ingenious I was, even in these early days of matrimony, in collecting in my own heart materials for future sorrow. My readers, however, are not to imagine that at this time anything more than an incipient and occasional discontent arose to cloud my pleasures. Taking them altogether, the first months of my married life were happy. I have indicated rather what passed in the secret recesses of my own mind than what was revealed to those around me by any distinct and outward manifestations, which were few and apparently insignificant. It is not enough to say that my husband little suspected these secret workings, for I myself was not aware of them. On the contrary, I felt that my lot was enviable. Harry was kind, generous, intelligent, and affectionate: his mother was warm-hearted, intelligent, and affectionate also. My home was a pleasant country house; my husband's circumstances were more than easy—they were ample. We had the means of doing good, had youth and health: and what more could I desire?

CHAPTER X.

THE LETTER.

"IT is very provoking that my correspondents will make such blunders," I said impatiently, one morning, when Henry put into my hand—with an apology from his mother—a letter directed to "Mrs. Temple, Temple Court," which, when she had opened, she found was intended for me.

"I trust it is of no consequence, Ellen," said my husband. "At any rate, you know my mother would not intentionally open a letter not addressed to herself."

"Oh no; it is not of much consequence, Harry, of course; but it is very annoying not to know for whom our letters are intended when we have got them; and it is very stupid of people not to know how to direct a letter. There is aunt Seymour, for instance, who will always direct to Mrs. Temple, when she knows I am *not* Mrs. Temple here; and I have asked her again and again to write Mrs. *Henry* Temple."

"Well, Ellen, now the letter has found its right owner, you may as well have the benefit of it," said my husband, good humouredly; for I had thrown it rather angrily aside.

"I don't know that I wish to read it now," I said, half playfully, and half in earnest. "If I do not have the first sight of my letters, I don't care to have them at all."

Henry smiled, and this vexed me. "I do not know what there is to laugh at," I said, reproachfully.

"Did I laugh, Ellen?" asked my husband, with a sigh. "I am sorry if I did."

"It is very disagreeable to see any one smiling at us when we

are vexed," I said; "especially any one whom we love;" and my eyes filled with tears.

"Dear Ellen, don't be troubled. I really did not know that I was smiling at you. But, just at the moment, you put me in mind of your cousin Clara and her moss-roses."

This was a standing joke with us. Not long before, Clara and her husband had paid us a visit; and on the morning of their departure I had gathered a bunch of moss-roses for my aunt Seymour. Clara was packing them in a tin case, when, unfortunately, her husband took them up and smelt them, a proceeding which excited Clara's anger, who vehemently protested that Mr. Colvin had inhaled all their perfume and made them worthless.

"Nonsense," said he; "they smell as sweetly as ever."

"How can you say so?" said she, "when you know you always smell so hard; and of course all the scent you take from a flower leaves so much the less for anybody else."

The discussion rose to a quarrel, which ended in the poor moss-roses being left behind as valueless.

The allusion did not please me. "It is not very kind of you, Henry, nor very polite, I think, to make such a comparison," I said.

"Then I am sorry I made it," he replied; "so do not be angry with me, Ellen."

"I cannot see what I have done to put you in mind of Clara and the roses, at all," I said.

"Why, my dear Ellen, you said that if you did not get the first sight of your letters, you did not care to have them at all."

"Well, Henry, and if I did say so, I cannot see what that has to do with Clara."

"I dare say nothing, Ellen; it was only an erratic wandering of my own thoughts. We will not say anything more about it, my love. But you will read your letter, will you not?"

No, not then; there would be plenty of time to do that. And then I returned to the old grievance, the misdirected letters.

My husband seemed troubled by my petulance. We had been married three years, and this matter of addresses and wrong addresses had been a frequent recurring source of vexation—to me at least.

Henry waited patiently till I had done complaining for that time; and then he said, gravely and sadly, "Perhaps, Ellen, it will be a comfort for you to know that, after a short time, such mistakes will not be so likely to occur again."

"Henry! what do you mean?" I asked. His manner almost alarmed me.

"My mother intends leaving Temple Court. Have a little more patience, Ellen, and you will be relieved of the annoyances of which you have sometimes complained."

"Harry! are you serious?" I exclaimed.

Yes; he was serious. It scarcely needed that he should tell me this, for his looks declared it. He was agitated and distressed.

"I did not intend to speak of it to-day," however, he continued; "but our conversation has led to it, and you may as well know it now as a few days later."

"What can be the meaning of this, Henry?" I asked. "Your mother going to leave Temple Court! and I to know nothing about it till ——. Is this using me kindly, Henry?" and I felt angry, if I did not look and speak angrily.

"Not unkindly, I hope, Ellen," said he; "at any rate, it is not meant unkindly."

"But it is unkind to treat me as if I were of no importance. I do not understand you now, however," I added. "You speak of Mrs. Temple leaving Temple Court: do you mean ——?" and I stopped short.

"I mean that my mother has thought it better to leave her old

home, and make a new one at Temple Cottage, her own house, Ellen; and, as soon as possible, arrangements will be made for carrying her intentions into effect."

"This is a very sudden determination," I said.

"No, not very sudden, Ellen. My mother has thought of it for a good while, and we both of us think that it will be best that it should be so."

"And I am to be treated like a child in the matter," I exclaimed passionately.

"If we had not thought it would be agreeable to you, Ellen, we should not have thought of my mother's removal," said my husband, calmly. "And if it falls in with your wishes, as I believe it does, your being made aware of her intention a day or two earlier or later is surely of no consequence."

"It is of consequence that I should be treated with some consideration, Henry," I said. "And as to its being agreeable to me, and falling in with my wishes, no one has any right to say this. I am sure I never uttered a word——" I stopped there—my conscience gave me a twinge.

"Ellen," said my husband, "it is not necessary that words should be in every case spoken to betray what is in the mind. I hoped, when we were married, that the arrangements made for my mother's remaining at Temple Court would not interfere with your comfort and happiness. Rather, let me say, I believed that her presence and society, and even her counsel, might be not only an advantage, but a source of pleasure to you. For some time I was reluctant to think otherwise; but the conviction has been forced upon me that my plan was a foolish one. Of late especially, it has been plain that my mother's residence with us is a frequent source of irritation to you. I could have wished it had been otherwise, but ——"

I hastily interrupted Henry. "You ought not to say this of

me," I said. "It is enough to have one's words and actions harshly judged; but you have no right to say what I have thought and felt. You may be very much mistaken."

"Tell me at once, and without reserve, that I have been mistaken," said Henry, "and I shall have a heavy weight removed from my mind."

No, indeed, I should not. If Henry chose to interpret and judge of me in that way, he must. It was for him to explain, I said, how he had fo[illegible] out what he supposed had been so long on my mind.

My husband di[illegible]in. He reminded me of many circumstances which h[illegible] manifest that his mother had become an object of je[illegible] and in which my self-will (he did not use the word [illegible]wever) had produced at least temporary discomfor[illegible]

"And withou[illegible] more instances of this kind," said my husband, "you [illegible] conscious that your general manner towards my moth[illegible]een distant and cold, and consequently must have been ve[illegible]essing to her."

"I am sorry m[illegible]er has been so unfortunate," I replied, angrily; "and it [illegible] cruel and unworthy of you, Henry, to have watched me [illegible]rt of way, and put such a construction on every trifle th[illegible]ppened. It would be enough to have one's words misint[illegible]."

"Have I misinterpreted either words or manner?" asked Henry.

"I shall not say whether you have or not," I answered. "If you think it worth while to take notice of every trifle, and treasure up every look and action of mine in this way, to bring such charges against me, you must."

Henry did not immediately reply: at length he said, in a low and troubled voice, "I have not treasured up every look and action, dear Ellen. You asked me to explain how I could guess

what your thoughts and feelings about my mother have been, and I have told you."

"Yes; by showing how much notice you have taken of trifles," I repeated.

My husband went to a book case and reached down a volume. "You remember what Hannah More says, Ellen?" and he repeated the lines:—

> "Since trifles make the sum of human things,
> And half our misery from our foibles [illegible]rings;
> Since life's best joys consist in peac[illegible] ease,
> And few can save or serve, but all [illegible]lease;
> Oh, let the ungentle spirit learn [illegible]e,
> A small unkindness is a great [illegible]
> Large bounties to bestow we [illegible]
> But all may shun the guilt o[illegible]

"You need not go on, Henry," I [illegible] he had finished his quotation. "It is too, too bad t[illegible]n this way: but you may say what you like, though [illegible] me an ungentle spirit—though it is not very polite, I [illegible] I know it is not very kind."

Henry explained that he did not app[illegible]y word of the quotation to me, but that he had referred [illegible] for the sake of the general sentiment; but this did not app[illegible]

"And you and your mother have be[illegible] this time caballing against me," I cried, impatiently.

"Indeed, Ellen, you are mistaken. [illegible] mother has never uttered a word of complaint; and you ought to know me too well to believe that I could, under any circumstances, be guilty of caballing against you, dear Ellen. But without having done this, the conviction has been growing in both our minds that it would on all accounts be better for her to retire to her own home. Our conversation has confirmed this conviction; and——"

I would not stay to hear more, but hastily left the room, and in another minute had fastened myself in my own chamber. While

the conversation was going on, I had tried to suppress the impatience I felt; but now it burst out in hysterical sobs. I endeavoured to persuade myself that I had been neglected, slighted, and treated with contempt, and that Henry no longer loved me.

"And all this," I thought, "has happened from my venturing to be dissatisfied with having a letter misdirected;" and again and again I sobbed out the words—"unjust! cruel!"

But other thoughts succeeded. Henry had said nothing that was not true. The presence of his mother had been a continual restraint, until at length it had become an insupportable grievance. Henry had mentioned only a few instances in which my impatience had broken out in petulant contradiction or sullen acquiescence. My own conscious memory could have supplied innumerable circumstances in which I had suffered jealousy and self-importance to embitter our intercourse, which might otherwise have been fraught with domestic enjoyment and social pleasure.

And I could but be aware also, that, in other particulars, my naughtiness of heart had produced a painful effect on my husband. In the three years which had passed away since our marriage, how frequently had we differed, until our differences had risen to disagreements, hasty words and ruffled tempers, when by yielding I might have conquered.

My readers will perhaps remember the hints my aunt Seymour had given me for managing a husband. I had never put these into practice, for I revolted from the idea of deception. Mine had been a different plan; but had it answered better than hers?

I looked back on those three years of married life, and almost wondered whether Henry and I could be the same beings that we were years and years before, when we wandered together through the woods and meadows of Fair Holt. Yes, we were the same; but new circumstances had arisen to call out the latent dispositions

of our minds. Henry, it may be, had too little consideration for what he considered the weaknesses of my sex, and was too apt to presume on the superior privileges of his own; and I, alas, how pertinaciously had I often striven for victory, and contradicted him for contradiction's sake!

And yet we loved one another. I was sure of it. Then my mind reverted to our dispute of that morning. "How foolish," I said to myself, "to have made so many words about an opened letter! And how foolish, after all, to have been so jealous of Henry's mother! I do not believe, if it had not been for aunt Seymour——"

Yes, aunt Seymour and my cousin Clara had, both of them, been to see me since my marriage, and I had once revisited London; and this renewed intercourse had kept alive and active the discontent which my aunt had first instilled against Mrs. Temple, and the unworthy suspicion that, so long as she lived with us, I should never, as they said, be mistress in my own house.

"If it had not been for my aunt Seymour, we should have gone on very comfortably," I thought; "and she ought to have known better than to interfere in that way about our domestic arrangements. And, after all," I thought on, "what reason have I to complain of Henry's mother? She is very kind and considerate; she does not interfere with my management: and if she does sometimes annoy me with her fondness for Henry, is it not natural that she should love him? At all events, she must not go from Temple Court in this way; and I will tell Harry so."

And with these softened feelings I descended to the room in which, an hour before, I had left my husband. He was not there. He was not in the house: he had ridden out half an hour before, I was told, when I inquired for him, and had left word that he should not be in till dinner time. It wanted several hours to dinner time.

The unfortunate letter lay on the table, yet unread. I took it up and read it. It was from my cousin Clara.

Poor Clara had not had much reason to congratulate herself on the "excellent connexion" she had formed, in her marriage with Mr. Colvin. She had attempted her mother's plan of "managing a husband," but with no success. Mr. Colvin was morose and obstinate, and would not be charmed, though Clara, in her fashion, charmed "never so wisely." He had found out the trick, he said, and, like a despatch in cipher, the key of which is in the enemy's hands, it was no longer available. Then had arisen a strong struggle for supremacy, in which the weaker had been compelled to give way; and Clara's letter was a sharp and sorrowful invective against husbands in general, and her own in particular.

The letter was read at an unhappy moment. It touched my recent sore, and with my sympathy for Clara was mixed up a remembrance of my own fancied "wrongs."

"They are all alike," I thought. "Lords of the creation, they call themselves; and the poor wives must submit to all their caprices. It is nothing short of tyranny. To think of Henry, now, going off in the way he has done, without condescending to give me any notice of his intentions, though he knew—he must have known—how miserable I was when he left."

In a moment my good resolutions had vanished; and I put on the aspect and bearing of an injured woman.

My feelings were not mollified when, on Harry's return, he told me that he had ridden over to Temple Cottage, to make some preliminary arrangements for his mother's removal thither. I listened to his explanations in dignified silence; and in dignified silence I witnessed the preparations which, from that day, began to be made for carrying Mrs. Temple's wishes into effect.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW CAUSES OF DISSATISFACTION.

The departure of Henry's mother, and the consequent changes in our household, were not so productive of comfort as I perhaps anticipated. It may be that, after all, I missed her society, besides feeling some degree of self-reproach for having been the principal cause of her removal from her old home. Certainly it was not pleasant to think of this; and though my husband forbore the utterance of any expressions of regret at the loss of his mother's daily intercourse, he could not conceal the restlessness of mind and body which it occasioned.

And one result, which I might have anticipated, but did not, was that, instead of more, I had less of his society. Very frequently, for instance, he would start up suddenly from the breakfast table, and something like the following colloquy would commence.

"I don't think there will be much rain to-day, Ellen."

"*I* think it will rain very hard before night. The glass is very low."

"Oh, the glass, the glass—there is no depending on that. The clouds are evidently breaking."

"It does not signify, I suppose. You are not thinking of going out this morning, are you, Harry?"

"Why, no; that is, I have not made up my mind. If it had been fine I should have asked you to take a drive over to see my mother."

"Oh, if it were ever so fine, I could not go to-day: I have a good deal to do at home."

"So you always say, Ellen, when I want you to go to Temple Cottage. I wish you would make an effort sometimes to oblige me.

However, it would be out of the question your going to-day, because of the rain. I think I shall ride over, though."

"And get wet to your skin, Harry, as you did last week. I wish you would not be so inconceivably careless."

"Pooh! a little rain won't hurt me. Besides, I can take my cloak. And, after all, I believe it won't rain to-day enough to signify."

"What is that pattering against the window now, Harry?" This was asked triumphantly.

"Only a few heat drops"—with an air of contempt.

"Why, Harry, it was only the day before yesterday that you went to Temple Cottage."

"That does not signify. I shall go to-day, Ellen; so that is decided."

Then my husband would ring the bell, and order his horse to be saddled, and I should see no more of him till dinner time—perhaps not even then; for occasionally he stopped to dine with his mother, and did not return till late in the evening.

If I complained of this, Harry had an answer ready. It was only right that he should pay some attention to his mother.

Another result of Mrs. Temple's departure from Temple Court was Harry's more frequently inviting dinner company. Now, I did not dislike company; and one of the complaints I had against our country home was the absence of excitement from society. But my husband's dinner companions were for the most part gentlemen of whom I had but a slight knowledge, and in whose conversation I felt little interest. There was a young clergyman, for instance, who differed in almost every respect, and very widely, from my old friend, Henry's uncle. His talk was principally of politics; and politics I disliked. There was a bachelor neighbour of our's, half farmer and half squire—rough and good-natured, but not particularly bright and intellectual; and *his* conversation put me in mind of a

verse in the Apocrypha: "With what wisdom shall he be furnished that holdeth the plough, and that glorieth in the goad, that driveth the oxen therewith, and is occupied in their labours; and his talk is about bullocks?"

Then there was a half-pay naval captain, who lived near Temple Court. He too was unmarried, and was glad of an invitation to our dinner table. I did not like him, for he was boisterous and rude; and I liked him still less when I knew that he had been disliked and feared for his arbitrary, tyrannical conduct as a commander. His conversation, moreover, was made up of interminable histories of his own doings; and I soon tired of that.

There was also an old fellow college man of Henry, who lived not many miles from us, but with whom my husband—since our marriage, at any rate—had not kept up much intimacy. *He* found his way to Temple Court much more frequently after Henry's mother left it than before; and though he conducted himself with the propriety of a gentleman, and behaved to me with marked politeness, his reminiscences of college life were not of the most edifying character; and the evident laxity of his moral principles made him an undesirable companion (so I thought, at least) for Henry.

There were other visitors also, with whom previously I had had but a slight acquaintance, and with whom my husband began now more freely to associate, to the frequent interruption of our personal intercourse and domestic habits.

Henry satisfied himself by saying that he needed more society now that his mother was gone; and perhaps he did not consider that while he was occupied with this kind of society, I was more than ever alone.

And then I became jealous of the attention my husband paid to his guests, and accused him, in my own mind at any rate, of increased indifference towards me.

I fancied, too—and here I was in some measure right—that the habits of these new friends exercised an injurious influence over those of my husband. Habitually, Henry was abstemious at meals, and practically a water-drinker. But he was hospitable; and his friends were, to say the least of it, self-indulgent. They drank wine plentifully with their dinner, and they liked to sit over their wine after dinner. I believe that my husband was on his guard against their seductions; but gradually the rules he had laid down for himself became more and more relaxed. Once, when the captain and the Oxonian had dined with us, and, after sitting longer than usual over their wine, had departed without entering the drawing-room, I could but see that Henry's cheek was more than usually flushed, and his eye unsteady. I was foolish enough to choose this time, of all others, to charge him with neglect and improper indulgence in the pleasures of the table. At first he forbore to reply to my harsh reproaches; and, encouraged by his forbearance, I continued my strictures. At length he became irritated, and, for the first time since I had known him, lost command of his temper, and retorted my charges with bitterness; he then left me in tears.

I had never before seen my husband so moved, and I was alarmed for the consequences. From that time, however, I could see that, though he continued to entertain his friends, he kept a stricter guard over himself. He apologized, moreover, for his outburst of violence; and if I had but been wise, and seized the opportunity thus afforded for a perfect clearing up of misunderstandings—for by this time, alas! petty disagreements were of frequent occurrence—what I have got to tell would probably not have to be written. But I received his advances with sullen dignity and offended pride, and asked for concessions which he refused to yield. And yet, had my heart been searched, he would have seen how tenderly and ardently I loved him. But the consciousness that I had not the same power

of control over my husband which his mother had imperceptibly exercised, vexed and irritated me.

Then, the departure of his mother did not add so much as I perhaps anticipated to my consequence as the solė mistress of Temple Court. I had no accession of this to expect from our servants, who had learned by degrees to consider me as the female head of the establishment; but beyond the park palings of Temple Court, I knew that I was still looked upon, by some at least, as a "foreigner," if not an usurper, and Henry's mother as the true and rightful Mrs. Temple. On her retirement, however, I had undertaken to fill her place as the superintendent of the school which she had established and sustained, and the reliever of the sick and necessitous. I had sometimes, indeed, accompanied her in her periodical rounds through the village, and fancied, perhaps, that my Fair Holt experiences had in some measure prepared me for these feminine duties. I had been associated also with my husband in many of his benevolent schemes for the benefit of his poorer tenantry, and might have expected, what indeed I received, some return of gratitude. But I had been disappointed also.

"And so the dear old lady is gone at last," said an aged widow, who had long been a pensioner on the bounty of my husband's mother, and on whom I called not long afterwards. She seemed quite distressed.

"The old lady" had left Temple Court, certainly, I said, but I was glad to have it in my power to say that it would make no difference to the poor widow. She would have her weekly dole continued, and she might come to the house, as usual, for her daily quart of milk and her weekly can of broth; and if there was anything else she wanted at any time, she had only to mention it to my servant Susan, and it should be attended to.

I was very kind, she said, and the old lady was very kind, she was sure; and she had always said that, so long as Mrs. Temple

lived, she should have a good friend. But it wasn't to be expected that a stranger that didn't know her, as Mrs. Temple had done for so many years since they were both girls—leastwise, since she herself was a girl, and Mrs. Temple was a young lady—it wasn't to be expected that a stranger should take so much notice of her; but I was very good to take the trouble to stand in Mrs. Temple's stead. But, for all that, she should miss the dear old lady, who was always so good to everybody, high and low, and who had such a nice way of talking.

"That is as much as to say," thought I to myself, "that I have not a nice way of talking;" and I went away mortified.

It was the same story everywhere. It was plain, either that I had failed to gain the confidence of the poor dependants of Temple Court, or that I was regarded with suspicion as the cause of "the dear old lady's" banishment. And what provoked me more was, that in every case I was evidently considered as only the almoner of "the right, real Mrs. Temple," as one of the old folk was pleased to call my husband's mother.

I complained bitterly of this to my husband one evening after I had been into the village.

"Well, Ellen," he said, "I don't know that there is much fault to be found with the poor people for showing gratitude."

"Pretty sort of gratitude to show to me, at all events," I said, pettishly.

"But only consider, Ellen," he rejoined; "my mother has lived at Temple Court full forty years, and has all that time been very active and benevolent. For a long time, you know, after my father's death, and till after I came of age, she had the entire management of everything about the estate; and it is natural that the people—the old folk especially—should have looked up to her as their friend and protector."

"I don't know anything about that, Henry," I said; "I only

know that the people about here are very disagreeable—quite different from the people at Fair Holt, and I shall never like them."

"Oh yes, you will, Ellen, if you live here long enough, and don't set yourself against them. But the Sussex peasantry are very keen observers."

"That is as much as to say that they make observations on me," I retorted, angrily.

"I dare say they do, my dear," said my husband.

CHAPTER XII.

MORE LETTERS.

A few months after my husband's mother had taken leave of Temple Court, I received three letters by the same post; one from my uncle Seymour, another from my aunt, and a third from cousin Clara.

Clara's letter, as usual, had in it a great deal about her husband, and his constant unkindness—for she wrote to me confidentially. Long before this, it was easy to see that her position was one of splendid misery. Mr. Colvin, so much older than my cousin, and destitute of principle as he was, had soon tired of his plaything, and had, moreover, been disappointed—deceived, he said—in the amount of Clara's portion; and he behaved towards her with scarcely decent respect when they had no visitors to cast a restraint over his words and actions. Clara, on the other hand, despised her husband; and finding that she could not manage him by a constant course of deception, took but light pains to conceal her contempt, and seemed to take a perverse and melancholy

pleasure in openly thwarting his purposes. Clara boasted of this in her letters to me; and in that which I this morning received, she gave me the history of a recent quarrel, which absolutely shocked me.

She begged me, also, to pay her a visit; and as an inducement to my compliance, said that, one of the few points on which she and her husband agreed, was in liking to have my society.

Her letter, however, was not wholly made up of references to her husband. She had two children; and, with some of a mother's partiality, she filled up a full page or more respecting them. Poor cousin Clara! her children were the only comforts of her life, she said: and how long they would be comforts, who could tell?

Nevertheless, I envied Clara her children; for—as my readers may ere now have concluded—I was childless.

My uncle's letter was, as usual, short and to the purpose. He wrote to inform me that the tenancy of Fair Holt had expired, and that the tenants were gone. He wished to know what was my pleasure respecting it.

My aunt's communication was more diffuse. It was principally on one topic, however, and that was London. And indeed, whenever she wrote to me, London was her prevailing theme. She could not think how anybody could live out of London. For her part, the country was everything that was dull and disagreeable—very well for a few days, but unbearable for a home.

"And when *are* you coming to London, Ellen?" her letter went on. "It is quite an age since we saw you. But you positively must come, and come directly; for——" and then she told me of engagements which were soon to go off, and parties which were to come on. "And now that poor Clara so seldom can come to —— Square, because of her obstinate and tyrannical husband," (my aunt had long ceased to speak of Clara's matrimonial state as an "excellent connexion")—"I have nobody to take with me

to these places, you know, or to help me to receive company at home."

There was much more to the same effect in my aunt's letter, which it is not necessary to repeat; but it concluded with an express and pressing invitation to me and Henry to pay an almost immediate visit to —— Square.

I put this and my uncle's letter into Henry's hand. I made it a rule to keep back from him Clara's confidential communications.

"What do you think about accepting aunt Seymour's invitation, Henry?" I asked, when he had glanced over the letters.

"That it is out of the question, Ellen," he said.

"I don't know why it should be, I am sure," said I.

"I could not leave home for some weeks if I ever so much desired it; and I cannot say that I wish to go to London at all, for a long time to come at least."

Why could he not leave home? I wished to know; and why should he wish not to go to London?

He could not leave home, Henry said, because he had sundry business to attend to, and had made engagements spreading over the next month, which he was not disposed to break; and he did not wish to go to London, because he did not choose to be so far from Temple Cottage for any length of time while his mother was unwell; and besides, he had a great aversion to London, and London habits, and London people.

"It is not very polite to say so, Henry," I said: "you might have remembered that they are my relations and friends, whom we should visit."

"I beg your pardon, dear Ellen," he said; "it was rude; but I really forgot your aunt and uncle and cousin were implicated in my sweeping expression of dislike. Permit me to retract."

"To retract your decision not to go to London, you mean?"

"No, no; only to retract the expression," said he.

"Oh, it is not worth while to retract that; for I know you do not like my friends," I retorted.

"I don't think you ought to say that, Ellen," he rejoined; "I am sure I have never said anything so personal as that."

"You have never said that you like them; and what you said just now proves that you do not."

"If I liked them ever so much," Henry replied, "it would not remove the obstacles to our accepting Mrs. Seymour's invitation. You know my mother's state of health——"

"Really, Harry," I exclaimed impatiently, "you do make a great fuss about your mother having a little cold. There you have been, two or three times a week lately, galloping over to Temple Cottage——"

"I would *drive* over, Ellen, if I could persuade you to go with me oftener than you do; and now we are upon the subject, you must allow me to say——"

"I don't want to hear you say anything about it, Harry," I said, interrupting him.

"Very well, Ellen; if you know so exactly what I was going to say, there is no occasion for my saying it, of course; but I must be allowed to do what I think right; and as my mother is more lonely than I could wish her to be at Temple Cottage, even though I do go to see her oftener than you approve, and as she has been really far from well lately, I think that a sufficient reason for not leaving home, if there were no other."

Let me say here, in passing, that I had occasionally visited Henry's mother at Temple Cottage, and she had more than once spent a day or two at a time at Temple Court since she left it as her home. I may truly add, also, that I really loved her: perhaps I should have shown my love more if my foolish and criminal jealousy had not been excited; but I argued with myself that Henry showed love enough for us both. It was true, also, that

Mrs. Temple was unwell; but Henry had been so unreasonably (as I thought) alarmed about her ailments, that I insensibly determined that there was nothing, or next to nothing, the matter with her. I did not see why his mother having a cold should keep him from going to London, and I said so.

There was much more said than I should care to repeat, if I could remember all. I know that we both of us waxed positive, and that I, at least, became angry. I told Henry that he seemed to think more of his mother's loneliness than of mine; that he forgot how often I was left solitary when he chose to go to Temple Cottage, or to have company at home which I could not join; and I urged the reasonableness of my wish to accept my aunt's invitation. It was a long while, I said, since I had been a single day from "this dull place."

My husband's lip slightly trembled when I said this, and his voice trembled too, as he replied that he was sorry the time could ever have come when I should call my home a dull place. It was the first time, for many a long year, he added, that Temple Court had been called dull; and that my lips should have pronounced it so, was rather mortifying as well as painful.

I could not help it, I said; that is, I could not help thinking and feeling it so: if it was disagreeable to him, I would not use the word again; and, perhaps, after a change, I should no longer find it dull.

Henry shook his head—sadly, I think, and said nothing.

"Well, what am I to say to aunt Seymour, Harry?" I presently asked.

"That I, at any rate, cannot accept her invitation," he replied, promptly.

"Do you wish me to go to London without you, then?" I said.

No, Henry did not wish it. If I would wait for a few weeks, until he was somewhat less busy, and his mother was recovered

from her present indisposition, he would willingly take the journey for my sake; not for his own, he added, for London was an abomination to him.

I remonstrated that by that time my aunt's parties—which she had written about—would be over; and that, in fact, everybody would be leaving London at the time he mentioned.

"There will be all the more room for us, then, Ellen," he replied, playfully; but I was too vexed to take it playfully.

"Nonsense, Henry; you know what I mean. The London season will be over, and everything will be as dull——" I was going to say as "Temple Court," but I did not say it. Henry said it for me, however, and his playfulness had departed.

"I am surprised, Ellen, that you should like the crowded parties, and late hours, and dissipations of London," he said, presently.

I did not know that I was fond of them, I said—not so fond, I thought, as he was of his own private dinner parties, which, as far as I could judge, were not so very profitable that they might not be dispensed with. But I thought it was hard that I should be forced to disoblige my aunt; and then there was my uncle's message about Fair Holt: it was only right that I should see him on that business. And cousin Clara, too, was expecting me in London; and if I delayed my journey, she might be going out of town, and so might my aunt and uncle: at any rate, it might not be convenient for them to receive me.

"In short, Ellen," said my husband, "I see you are determined to go. Very well; if you must, you must."

We had never, I think, been so mutually displeased with each other as we were that day. It was a most miserable, unhappy day. The more we discussed the subject of my aunt's unfortunate letter, the more determined were each of us——nay, let me not say this; for Henry had reasons, at least, to give for his determination; I had none worth mentioning to give for mine: the more deter-

mined I was, then, to carry my own point and to have my own way.

The next day I gave orders to Susan, who was still my own personal attendant, to prepare and pack up for the journey, and a week later I and Susan were on our way to London.

In the meantime, very little had passed between Henry and myself respecting my intentions. He was kind and polite, but unusually grave and taciturn. He neither asked me when I intended to go, nor how long I meant to be absent from Temple Court. He seemed bent on leaving me at full liberty to please myself.

I flattered myself, indeed, that he would relent, and would, after all, accompany me; but day after day passed away, and he made no preparations.

When I said good-bye, just before I stepped into the post-chaise, I added, "I shall see you in London next week, Harry?"

"You are mistaken, Ellen," he said; "I have no intention of going to London at all now."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRUGGLE FOR VICTORY.

My journey to London was not a pleasant one. I could not feel comfortable. The weather was fine, and the scenery was fine; the change was agreeable, and the motion was exhilirating; but I was far from being satisfied with myself. I had never before committed myself so openly to an opposition to my husband's wishes; at any rate, I had never carried my opposition so far; and there was something in his looks, when I parted with him, which said too plainly that I had taken a false step.

"After all," I thought within myself, as we drove rapidly along, "why could I not have waited a few weeks, or a month or two? There is no such pressing, urgent reason why I should be going to London just now. I wish I had thought more about it." You may think it weak, reader; but let me confess that more than once, during the first stage, I was on the very point of calling out to the post-boy to turn his horses' heads and take the way back again to Temple Court. And when the horses were changed at the end of that stage, I even opened my lips with this very purpose; but pride and self-will gained the victory and closed them again.

I remembered, unhappily, one expression in my cousin Clara's last letter, which confirmed me in my resolution to go on, and carry out my opposition. It was this: "You may rely on it, Ellen, a wife must be either a tyrant or a slave;" (I found out afterwards that Clara had borrowed this very foolish and untrue axiom from a book she had been reading); and I think the jingle of it struck me. "I don't want to be a tyrant," I argued, when the chaise was once more in motion; "but, much as I love Harry, I don't choose to be the slave of his unreasonable perverseness. And it is perverseness in him, and nothing less, to have set himself so stubbornly to oppose my wishes."

Perhaps my old Susan's presence also had something to do with the continuance of the journey. Possibly I had made too much of her; she had been my companion from childhood; she was ten years older than myself; she was affectionate, and attached to me: I may say all this in extenuation of my fault. But she was not very well fitted to be my prime minister; and this, in fact, she had by degrees become. She knew that there had been some dispute between Henry and myself about this very journey, and that I had so far conquered by my obstinacy as to have set out upon it at last against his wish. I believed that in her heart she sympathized with me in this—well, let me call it by its right

name—this *rebellion;* and I would not humble myself in her sight by appearing to repent. It would be owning myself vanquished if I should return, and I would not be guilty of such weakness; for, after all, was it not unreasonable and unkind—so I ventured to put it to myself—in my husband to have attempted to thwart me?

Besides, Susan was in high spirits about this visit to London: she liked London, and wanted a change; and it would be cruel to disappoint her. So we went on and on, and, after a long day's journey, reached —— Square.

There I soon recovered my spirits—or my spirit. My aunt Seymour was pleased to see me, and made light of my having left Temple Court without my husband. She dared say he was, or fancied himself, too busy to leave home: those gentlemen are apt to think so much of their own private affairs and arrangements, she said. I did not tell her, in so many words, that I had left home in opposition to Henry's wishes—to his earnest request; but I believe she guessed how matters had been, and she made so light of it herself that I began to make light of it too.

Then she had so much to tell me about herself and her family affairs, and her London friends and visitors; so much, too, about "poor Clara, and that odious Mr. Colvin," and so many plans to discuss, that before she had done my head was in a whirl of excitement such as I had never known at Temple Court.

There was my uncle, too, who wanted to talk about Fair Holt; but this we put off to another time: and there was Clara to go and see the next day.

Poor Clara! she was very wretched, though at first she strove to hide it. I wonder now, that it did not then occur to me how much I had to be thankful for, in my husband and my home. But it did not; or, if the thought crossed my mind, it was stifled by Clara's repinings, and by her almost fierce invectives against conjugal infidelity and tyranny in general; for, with the tenacity

of a woman, she would not admit, and perhaps the thought had never sought admittance into her mind, that her own husband was an unfavourable and unworthy specimen of other married men. "They are all alike," said she, impatiently; "only some show it more than others, and some wives have more spirit than others, and a better way of managing; but, one and all, they are the most self-willed and tiresome beings in creation. You know it, as well as I do, Ellen," she added; "only you don't say so much about it as I do."

And really, Clara talked so earnestly, and was evidently so fully persuaded of the truth of her remark, that, for the time, I almost believed there was some truth in it.

Two days, three, many days passed away, and I was once more in the whirl of gay London. My uncle kept on his former course, I found, going to business in the morning, and returning to a late dinner—sometimes cheerful and even facetious, but perhaps oftener gloomy and taciturn. My aunt kept on in *her* former way also; visiting and receiving visitors, going out to evening parties, or holding them at home. Of Clara I did not see much. I was to visit her when I had done with —— Square; and that time was not yet fixed.

My uncle and aunt kept on in the same half-and-half course, too, as regarded religion and the world. They had their favourite place of worship and their favourite minister; and they kept up a connexion with what they called the *élite* of the religious society with which they were connected; and they drew the line somewhere, though I could never exactly understand where, between what they termed lawful and unlawful amusements. It must have been rather an indefinite line, after all; for their lawful amusements embraced balls, and cards, and theatres. They never went to the racecourse, however, and when my aunt's parties were of a particularly sober cast, especially if a popular minister were present,

the evening was "wound up and finished off"—as my uncle expressed it—with prayers.

Whether this compromise was acceptable, or whether this equivocal dallying with mere worldly pleasures on the one hand, and a profession of religion on the other, was really productive of satisfaction to my relatives, let those decide who act as they acted. Let me only say, that it is with deep regret and bitter sorrow that I look back on my own participation in such an incongruous course of life; and that I can but apply to myself the question of an apostle, who asked, "What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" But I will not weary you, reader, with reflections.

I had written to Henry to inform him of my safe arrival; but several days passed before I received a reply: and then it was short and hurried—written as I thought, too, in an ungracious mood. He hoped I should enjoy my visit, but—(this was in reply to a question I had put to him)—he had not the least intention of altering his mind; he was quite decided not to follow me to town.

I stayed a full month at —— Square, and in all that time very little communication passed beween Henry and myself. I had little to tell him which would interest him to know, I thought; for my time was fully taken up with the engagements to which my aunt Seymour had referred, and these were not sufficiently to Henry's taste to encourage me to write about them. Besides, I was offended with him, and absence did not altogether appease me. Rather, let me say, my resentment was kept alive by his short and business-like notes—so different from his former letters, when we had been sundered; and also by my aunt, who did not hesitate to advise me to keep up my dignity, and show my independence towards my husband.

I had no idea of staying so long in London when I left Temple

Court, but the time slipped away almost unperceived by me. At the end of a full month I had not paid my promised visit to Clara: nevertheless, if at that time, or before then, Henry had but written, "I sadly miss you, and want you at home, dear Ellen," I believe I should have returned with a glad heart: but he did not. He expressed no wish, nor even asked how long my visit was to last. This chagrined me.

I stayed a month with Clara. Poor Clara! she was glad of my society, for it procured her an imperfect respite from the unkind treatment of her husband. Their house was a scene of unquiet, however, at best. Much visiting, much bustle, much dissipation; no domestic enjoyment. And now—though I did not on my first arrival in London—I began feebly to contrast my cousin's condition with my own, and to feel an awakening attraction to Temple Court.

But by this time, also, I had become increasingly vexed and hurt at my husband's apparent carelessness about my return, and by his inflexibility. It had become to me now a trial of strength, and pride, and affection, whether or not he would yield to my wishes, and meet me in London; and his not very frequent letters were sufficiently explicit on this point. He had quite made up his mind not to leave Temple Court. He did, indeed, give as one reason that his mother continued in an ill state of health; but as he said nothing more explicit respecting her, I was persuaded by my relatives to think that this was a mere excuse, and that he was only carrying out a point against me.

"Henry will soon be tired of sulking," said my aunt to me one day, when I felt unusually worried by his silence, and complained of it. "You will see, if you hold out a little longer, how glad he will be to come round."

And Clara laughingly said something about "a tame wife;" I do not remember exactly what, but it was to the effect that if I

did not conquer now, I might expect to be "a tame wife" for ever afterwards. I loved Harry too well to expose him to the degradation of having "a tame wife." I said this to myself, and it may be that I thought it also.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT FAIR HOLT AGAIN.

"WHAT are we going to do about Fair Holt, Ellen?" my uncle asked me one day when I called at —— Square.

I must explain. When my dear father died, and I had to leave my old home, a tenant was found for it, in its ready-furnished condition. This, as my uncle had said, saved him a world of trouble, and was, all things considered, advantageous to my interests. But the lease having expired, the tenant had departed, leaving Fair Holt in charge of the gardener and his wife—my father's old gardener—who, till it could be otherwise occupied, retained two or three rooms in the now deserted house.

Since I had been in London, my uncle had succeeded in obtaining a tenant for the land belonging to the estate; but Fair Holt remained untenanted.

"What are we going to do about Fair Holt, Ellen?"

I had not thought much about it until then; but the mention of the name—it would be vain to ask why at that particular time more than at any other—very vividly brought my old home before me. Since the visit to my old friend, Henry's uncle, of which I have spoken, I had not seen Fair Holt; and that was years ago. What should hinder me, now that I was half way thither, and that Fair Holt was at my own disposal—what should hinder me from going to see the dear old place?

I did not take long to consider about it. The fact is, I was

aded with my two months' excitement of a London season, and I wanted a change; while at the same time I revolted against returning to Temple Court until Henry had made some concessions. I had really begun to think myself seriously injured by him, and that he could have but little love left for me, or he would not treat me with such neglect. I would show him, then, that if he were not anxious to have me at home, I was not so very anxious to return. I would go and pass a week or two, or three—as I might determine when I got there—at Fair Holt.

I wrote to my husband to tell him of my intention; and he replied by return of post.

"I shall not interfere with your plans, Ellen," he wrote; "and you will not, of course, interfere with mine. As to my following you to Fair Holt, it is simply out of the question: I have no more intention now than I had when you left Temple Court, of absenting myself from home for a single day. As, however, it will in all probability be some time before you return, I have prevailed on my mother to leave Temple Cottage to take care of itself; and she is here. She needs constant attendance, Ellen, for she is not better than when you went away from home; she is not so well. She sends her love, and would write to you; but writing fatigues her." There was more in the letter, but not much—there were no concessions. There was a bank-note, however, for fifty pounds, which Henry judged I might require for my additional expenses.

It made me very angry and very miserable. "Henry does not love me; I can see that he has left even caring for me," I said to myself; and I cried very much over that letter.

But I did not alter my intended course: I was the more confirmed in it.

"You may pack up, Susan, as quickly as you can," I said, when I had wiped the tears from my face. "We shall leave London to-morrow."

"Back to Temple Court, Miss Ellen?" asked Susan, quickly, and brightening up. I may as well explain that my old Susan as often called me by the old familiar name as by the newer one; and I liked the sound of it from her lips.

"No, not to Temple Court; I am going to Fair Holt." I had not before spoken of my intention to Susan.

She looked at me with wondering eyes.

"You would like to see the dear old place again, shouldn't you, Susan?" I asked.

"Oh yes; you needn't ask me that, ma'am; I shall dearly like to see it—dearly." But though Susan said this, there was, as I could see, an unsatisfied look on her countenance. I did not seem to notice this, however.

"Well, we shall spend two or three weeks there—a month perhaps," I said.

"Oh then, Mr. Temple will be there," said Susan; "that will be pleasant."

I shook my head: "Mr. Temple writes word that he cannot leave Temple Court; so we must manage to do without him."

Susan's countenance was again overcast. "Oh, Miss Ellen, oh, ma'am! I am so sorry," was all she said; and she walked slowly out of the room.

She came in again presently, however, on some errand, and I asked her then what she meant by saying she was so sorry.

Susan looked confused, and I could see that tears were ready to start from her eyes. "I think you can guess what I meant," she said.

No, indeed, I could not. I told her, at any rate, she seemed to have a deeper meaning than that she merely regretted that my husband and I could not enjoy the holiday together. Was it not so?

Yes, it was so; she hoped I would not be offended, she said;

but it had been so much on her mind my having stayed away from Temple Court, my own home, and Mr. Temple not coming near. She knew, she said, that there had been some little disagreement about the journey, but it seemed as if—as if it had come to something much more serious than that; and it troubled her very much to hear what was said—what the servants at —— Square, and at Mr. Colvin's as well—had dared to hint even in her presence.

"What can you possibly mean, Susan?" I demanded.

"I know it is false," said Susan, energetically; "and I told them they ought to be ashamed of themselves to say such a thing; but they only laughed at me, and said it was all very well for me to pretend not to know anything about it, but that it was true for all that, that you and Mr. Temple had parted for good and all, Miss Ellen."

Parted! My husband and I parted!

Yes, that was what had been talked about, Susan said; and though she knew how false and wicked it was, she could not help feeling sorry that I should lengthen my stay from home. If I were to go to Fair Holt, and stop there a month, it would be a quarter of a year that I should have been separated from Mr. Temple; and that would be a long time, would it not? Susan asked. And there would be no telling what people might say.

For the time I was too indignant to reply. I was angry with Susan for her boldness and anxiety—angry with the servants for their impertinent tattle—with my aunt and cousin for having, as I could not help thinking they had, spoken of me as an ill-used wife—and angry, above all, with my husband for his perverseness. I forgot at that time that I ought to have been angry with myself for my proud and rebellious spirit. Instead of this, I was more than ever determined to carry out my plan; and I went to Fair Holt.

We arrived late in the evening at my childhood's home. The old gardener and his wife had made some hurried preparations to receive me; and when I retired to rest, it was in the chamber which I had once called my own.

With what a mixture of painful and pleasant feelings I woke on the following morning, and wandered solitarily over the dear old home, let those who have revisited the scenes of childhood after long absence imagine for themselves. Here was the parlour in which I had sat day after day with my father; there was the chamber in which he died, and the first great sorrow of life had fallen heavily upon me. Here was his old library, where also I had received my daily lessons from my kind old governess. Not much change had passed over the dwelling: the furniture of every room was familiar to me; and the books—such of them as had not been removed to Temple Court—were in their old places on the shelves. From the windows I could see the valley, the river, and the woods beyond; and nearer at hand the village itself, with the spire of the church, and the chimneys of the parsonage house, just as they might all have been seen years gone by. No perceptible change had passed over *them;* but other changes had taken place: friends had passed away, hopes had been chilled, and I myself—oh, how changed I seemed then!

I tried to escape from myself, and, summoning Susan, I strolled out into the garden. It had been neatly kept, for the old gardener was proud of his garden; and, hobbling after us, he talked incessantly of all that he had been doing since he saw me last, and pointed out familiar objects which I had recognised at the first glance. There was the old pear-tree which used to bear such loads of fruit, and was still as prolific as ever, he said. There was the arbour, which he himself had designed and reared, and around which he had planted laurels and bay, to make it snug and pleasant. Didn't I remember it—that old arbour? he asked.

As if I could ever forget my father's favourite garden retreat, and mine too, where Henry and I, on our first acquaintance as boy and girl, had sometimes rested ourselves after our long rambles.

But I will not tire you, reader, with these reminiscences. The day passed away, and another, and another. I had, as I have said, no fixed intentions respecting my stay at Fair Holt, and for the first day or two I seemed almost frightened at the solitude into which I had plunged myself, and depressed by the vivid remembrances which everything around me evoked. But this depression began to wear away. I renewed my intercourse with Mrs. Page, my former teacher, and visited, in their cottages, as many of the old folks as remembered me; and listened with pleasure, because I could hear without jealousy, their sorrowful regrets at the changes which had taken place at Fair Holt and the parsonage during the few years which were past and gone. In one of these cottages I accidentally met with the successor of old Mr. Temple, and his lady: after that, they called on me at Fair Holt, and this led to my visiting the parsonage in due form.

I was pleased with these new acquaintances, and when the ice of ceremony was once broken, our interchange of visits was renewed almost every day; and every day, alas! I thought less than on the former one, how my place at home was unfilled, and my husband's soul vexed by my self-will.

But did Henry care for me? Did it matter to him whether I were at Temple Court or at Fair Holt? I pretended to myself to believe that my absence from home was no such heavy affliction to him; but it was only a pretence. If I had really believed it, the thought would have been too full of anguish to be borne. I am sure of this now, though I did not think so then. What was really in my heart, perhaps it would be hard to say, except that I fancied I was showing a proper degree of pride and resentment in meeting indifference with simulated indifference, and

neglect with pretended neglect; and that if I only held out long enough, I should bring my repentant husband to my feet; and then, how magnanimous and gentle I would be!

And thus three weeks passed away.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST.

THERE was an old man in the village, a shoemaker, whom I very well remembered as disagreeable, inquisitive, and caustic, and on whom I had not cared to call during my sojourn at Fair Holt. It happened, however, that one evening as I was returning from a long walk, fatigued and painfully agitated in mind, though I knew not why, I met old Thompson unexpectedly, I would have passed him with a slight salutation; but he would not let me off so easily. He had been so wanting to see "Miss Ellen," he said; but he supposed I was too proud now to look in upon him and his old woman, as I used to do years back, when I was a sprightly young lady, and "went about with the old parson, and Master Harry, as they called him, and the rest on 'em."

Oh no, I said, I hoped I was not proud; but my stay at Fair Holt would be very short, I thought; but if it would be any pleasure to him and his wife, I would look in upon them before I left.

Very short, would it be? he repeated, with a penetrating, or what he meant for a penetrating, look from beneath his shaggy eye-brows. Well, he wasn't sorry to hear that.

Not sorry!

"No, not sorry at all, ma'am," said the old man, sharply: "you know I was always plain-spoken; and if all that I have heard is true, you have been here too long already."

"I cannot say what you have heard, Mr. Thompson," I replied, coldly; for I felt that I had a right to be offended at his speech; "but I suppose I must be allowed to be the best judge of my own affairs."

"May be, ma'am—may be; no offence, I hope," he went on, not at all abashed. "But it is not everybody as is that. I beg your pardon, however, and hope you will forgive an old man who wishes you well, if he does not prophesy smooth things."

"What can you mean, Mr. Thompson?" I asked angrily.

"Just this, Miss Ellen—you must let me call you Miss Ellen, it comes more natural than the other name—they do say that you have got tired of living with your husband, that's Master Harry Temple, and are trying how nice it would be to be unmarried; and I say that no good can come of it." And he planted his walking-stick firmly in the ground, and resting both hands upon it, looked me full in the face

"Who dares to say that of me?" I asked; "and what right have you to pry into my private affairs, and my husband's? I think it is very impertinent indeed, and very wrong. Do you not remember where it is said, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour?'"

"God forbid I should do that," rejoined the old man, reverently; "but there are more texts than one in that good old book, Miss Ellen; and another of them runs something like this: 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord; for the husband is the head of the wife.' There's text for text, Mrs. Temple."

I would not stay to hear more; but, coldly thanking the old shoemaker for his unnecessary concern on my account, telling him that he was mistaken in his conjectures, and warning him against repeating them to others, I hastened home.

I have said that I was fatigued and agitated before I fell in with

old Thompson, and the short conference with him had not allayed that agitation. By the time I reached Fair Holt, I felt seriously unwell, and little able to give Susan the sharp lecture which was on my mind, for having, as I supposed, made me the subject of conversation in the village.

I was still less able to do it when a letter from Henry, which had arrived during my absence, was put into my hands. The letter had been by some means delayed at the post-office, and was several hours behind its proper time of delivery. I had written to my husband twice or thrice since I had been at Fair Holt, but until now had received no reply; and it may be that this was one cause of my lowness of spirits. I opened the letter with trembling hands and read as follows:—

"DEAREST ELLEN—If I have seemed neglectful, do not blame me too severely. And if, while you have been absent from Temple Court, I have not written so often or so much as you expected, forgive me. I am afraid you have thought me unkind in persisting in my determination not to join you in London or at Fair Holt; and it may be that the determination was at first a hasty one. Do not judge too harshly of me, however; for I deeply regret that we had the shadow of a misunderstanding on the subject. You will not be any longer angry with me, I am sure—if you have hitherto reproached me—when I tell you that I am in deep distress. I have not liked to trouble you with what might have proved unfounded anxieties; but I can no longer doubt. Dear Ellen, my mother—my own dear mother—IS DYING. I have written heretofore as slightly about this illness as I was able, for I hoped it might be soon removed, and I did not wish to mar your enjoyments or to hasten your return. But the disease has taken a fearful stride, and is making rapid progress, and nothing remains but to apply such alleviations as we are able, and to submit to the Divine will; but

it is a saddening stroke, which exceeds in painful severity all that I have ever yet felt. Dear Ellen—dear wife—I am sure when you receive this, you will hasten your return to

"Your poor, loving
"HARRY."

With what self-reproach and keen upbraidings I was stricken before I had come to the end of this letter, it would not be easy for me now to describe. For a moment my pain and weariness were lost and swallowed up by greater pain of mind. I hastily summoned Susan, and—as I afterwards learned—in passionate and incoherent language declared my intention of commencing my homeward journey in that self-same hour.

It was well for me then that Susan had more sense and self-composure than I. I remember but little that passed; but the sharp, burning, throbbing pain in my temples, and the restless weariness of body which presently returned with tenfold violence, as it then seemed, I can never forget.

"You must not think of leaving Fair Holt to-night; you must not, indeed," said Susan, as I lay writhing on the couch, upon which, on the recurrence of the distressing paroxysms of pain, I had thrown myself, with the vain hope of relief. And she soothed me as she would have soothed a fractious child. "To-morrow, dear Miss Ellen, to-morrow, it shall be as you think best; but to-night I must have my way."

And she had her way; for I had no power to resist. So completely was I prostrated in mind and body, that when I attempted to write a hurried reply to Henry's letter, the pen repeatedly fell from my hand, and the few words which, after many painful efforts, I traced, had neither sense nor coherence.

I was conscious of this at the time, and I abandoned the task. "I need not write," I said at length, pushing my desk from me; "I shall be there before a letter can reach him."

Before morning, I was delirious.

Long afterwards, I knew, or at least it was conjectured, that I had taken the infection of a dangerous fever from the child of a wretched woman who, not many days after my arrival at Fair Holt, passed through the village begging, and who—having met me as I was walking alone—besought me to examine the sick child which she carried in her arms. I assented to this, gave the woman some relief, and saw her no more; and before my illness commenced, as was afterwards discovered, the child and its mother were both dead. I return, however, to my own personal narrative.

Through that long, as it appeared to me, and painful night, my illness rapidly increased. Susan and the old gardener's wife watched by my bedside till dawn, and plied me with such remedies as were at hand; but vainly. And in the morning, without my consent, which I was past the power of giving or withholding, the gardener was despatched for a doctor—the same who had attended my father in his last illness.

I know nothing more that happened for many, many days; but while I was insensible to all around me, my disordered imagination was filled with strange and distressing visions. Around me appeared to be mocking sprites, active and horribly grotesque in their aspects, pointing at me as they bounded to and fro, with long skinny fingers, and leering at me with evil, vindictive eyes. I was, as I thought, cruelly tormented with burning wires incessantly drawn beneath me as I lay, and constantly renewed, from which I strove to escape by frantically casting myself from the bed, and should again and again have rushed from the room, but that I was restrained by my attendants. Meanwhile, the scene appeared to shift from place to place. Now I was at Temple Court, but my husband was not there; every face was strangely averted from me as with intense loathing. Then I was in —— Square, in one of my aunt's gayest parties; but there was none to

speak a cheering word, or greet me with a familiar smile; while here, and at every place, the mocking sprites danced hideously around me.

And amidst it all, one form was never long absent, and that the only form I could recognise. Whether at Temple Court, or in London, or at Fair Holt, as my fancy rapidly flitted from place to place, there was Old Thompson, with his sharp eye perpetually fixed on me from beneath the penthouse of his shaggy brows. Oh, how I loathed and feared him; how, in my ravings, I begged he would go, and leave me in quiet; how I demanded that he should be removed by force! There he was, ever looking at me, and grimly smiling, as in scorn of my weakness and agony. I could not shut him out; day and night, day and night he was there, at my bed-foot when my eyes were cast that way; on my right side if I turned; on my left, if I once again altered my position: and, oh horrible! when I closed my eyes, he was more vividly before me than ever.

He spoke, too: he was always talking; beginning at the deepest bass, and gradually rising to the shrillest treble, quicker and quicker at every utterance till the climax was reached, and then recommencing the never-ending theme. And always the same words—always the same; day and night the same: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands!"

"Wives, submit yourselves—submit yourselves, unto—your own husbands, own husbands, husbands."

Oh, that terrible old shoemaker!

God had mercy on me at last. From delirium I lapsed into utter insensibility.

And then, one happy, happy day, as I lay with closed eyes, I became gradually conscious of whispered voices around me—oh,

how different from that of Old Thompson! and of a cooling, gentle air fanning me. Pain was gone; terror had fled; the horrible visions had vanished.

I did not open my eyes; for I feared to break the delicious spell that seemed cast over me; and my weak wandering senses became more and more conscious of blessed reality.

Presently, lips were gently laid on mine, and a warm tear fell upon my cheek; and then I looked up.

"Harry, Harry! dear, dear Harry! dear husband!" I could only whisper the words; and my poor thin arms were so weak, so very weak, that I could not throw them round his neck.

It did not need. His arm was round me.

"Dear Harry! Dear husband!" I could not say anything else.

The next day, and the next, he sat by my bedside, never leaving me, save when I slept; and then my dear old governess relieved his watch.

I was pronounced out of danger. The crisis was past, and recovery, though it might be slow, was to be confidently hoped for and calculated on. But it was not till another and another day had passed, and strength was evidently returning, that he suffered me to speak—even of his mother.

At length he told me how very ill she was, sinking in rapid decline; but how, when she first heard of my illness, she had made it her own urgent request that Henry would forget the mother in his care for the wife; and how he had hastened to Fair Holt, scarcely daring to hope that he should see his mother again, and fearing that mother and wife would soon be lost to him.

"And how long, dear Harry, how long have you been here?" I asked in a low voice; for as yet my strength was like the feebleness of infancy. He had been by my bedside many days, he said, before my consciousness returned; but that bitterness was over now.

"And your mother, Henry—your dear mother?"

"She yet lives."

"Go, Harry; leave me now; you must indeed. I am well cared for; you must not remain here any longer; I have kept you too long already:" it was not from jealousy that I said this. "But bless me, Harry, before I go; and—oh, forgive, forgive!"

"Dearest, I have nothing to forgive," he said, and tears rolled down his manly cheeks; "or rather, we have something, each of us perhaps, to forgive and to forget."

"Not to forget, Henry, dear Henry; not to forget. But do not let us speak of this now. You must think only of your mother; and hasten, hasten. It may be too late already."

And Henry left me the next day, because I wished it; but shall I not say how, before he pressed my cheek and bade me farewell, he prayed with me—and how earnestly he prayed!—that the chastening providences through which we had passed and were passing, and through which we might have yet to pass, might yield in us both the peaceable fruits of righteousness; that we might both be instructed and led, and be made more and better to each other, and more Godward and heavenward than we had ever been. And so he left me.

And my dear old governess, kind Mrs. Page, became my constant nurse, and much nursing I needed for many weeks. And as I slowly regained health, did I, from time to time, confess to her my folly, and pride, and self-will, and perverseness; and not to her alone—no, not to her alone.

And then, how mildly and kindly did she counsel me, and from her own history show me how every evil passion is the torment of its own possessor! And how did she encourage me to hope that—though past errors could be neither obliterated nor recalled—for the time to come I might be the wiser and the happier for the things that I had suffered.

And in the silence of night, and the solitude of my chamber by day, how in that precious season of convalescence did the memory of my father, and his past instructions, and the never-forgotten friendship of Henry's uncle, revive in my heart; while the giddy scenes of the world, the spirit of which I had, alas! too eagerly imbibed, seemed like the madness which indeed they were. How also did I review, in mind and soul, the conjugal vow—too often uttered in thoughtlessness or in mockery—to "love, honour, and obey!" And how, with all and above all, as I humbly trust, did I seek Divine grace and help for time to come, and pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

I was yet unable to leave the sitting-room, and brave the outer air, when Henry once more came to Fair Holt. He was in deep mourning—we were both of us in deep mourning—for his mother was dead.

Shall I speak of my return to Temple Court? Shall I tell how many happy, thrice happy years I have passed there since? There is no need.

We pass a few weeks of every summer at Fair Holt, in memory of those old times, and this is all the change we have ever sought or needed. Long as he lived, old Thompson used to be among the first to greet our arrival; and I never heard him repeat the ungracious words that he was not sorry my stay was likely to be short. At first I used to shudder to see his sharp, quick eye and shaggy eyebrows, and to hear his deep-toned voice. But I got accustomed to it, and I never told him how he had haunted my fever-stricken brain.

At last he died, and his "old woman" died, and my doctor died, and my dear old governess died also. Susan was married years and years ago, and has grandchildren. My uncle and aunt died; and my poor cousin Clara died, deserted and broken-hearted.

Why should I strive to hide it? My husband's' head is gray—very gray; and mine has gray hairs here and there upon it also. But we do not seem old to each other, though we probably do to all the world besides.

Reader, I have told you as much of my history as it concerns you to know. Farewell.

THE WEDDING RING.

"AND now, my dear Lady Sophia," said Mrs. Stacey, as she seated herself in her open barouche by the side of her friend, after a prolonged visit to Hunt and Roskell's, "is there any place to which you would wish to go, or would you prefer a drive in Hyde Park on this lovely afternoon?"

"Thanks," replied the young lady; "I should be glad to be left at Mrs. Ellesmere's in Grosvenor Square."

"The very place where I ought to leave my card. Number —, Grosvenor Square," said the lady to the powdered footman who stood waiting for orders; he touched his hat, and the next moment the carriage was rolling along Bond Street.

"You are very intimate with the Misses Ellesmere, I believe," observed Mrs. Stacey to her young companion, as they drove on.

"Oh, we are like sisters; we were at school together. I am to be bridesmaid to Matilda: you know, of course, that to-morrow is fixed for the wedding day."

"It is to be a double wedding, is it not? I heard that both the Misses Ellesmere were engaged."

"Oh yes, they are both to be married on the same day, and both to be dressed exactly alike—white moire antique and Brussels lace veils; and there is the end of the similarity," laughed the young lady; "for the one goes to Standishton Park, and the other —to St. Clement's Lane in the City! Poor Marion should have

her white moire dyed instanter, or the smoke of her new home may save her the trouble."

"Rather a low marriage?" inquired Mrs. Stacey, lowering her tone.

"No," replied Lady Sophia, playing with her silver card case, "not exactly *low*. The Rev. Mr. Atherton is of good family, and an excellent man, I understand." There was something in the lady's manner which made her very praise sound depreciating. "But Matilda's is a brilliant marriage: rank, fortune, everything that could be wished. You should only see the splendid dressing-case with which Sir John has presented her—all fitted up with gold, and such workmanship!"

"Something very different from what will ever make its appearance in St. Clement's Lane, I suppose?"

"Oh, poor Marion! she will not even keep a carriage! She will never be able to stir out; walking in a lane in the city would of course be out of the question. Is it not quite dreadful to think of it?" said Lady Sophia, with an affected sigh.

"And so you are to be bridesmaid to the future Lady Standishton?"

"Yes, each of the sisters has four. Sir John's cousin Lady Louisa and the Misses Templeton are to be my companions as Matilda's."

"And Miss Marion's?"

"Oh, Mr. Atherton has sisters—six, I believe, and the youngest on the wrong side of thirty, besides cousins innumerable. Marion's only difficulty must have been in selecting among so many charming young ladies. Her bridesmaids are to appear in white muslin bonnets, as the nearest possible approach to conformity with Matilda's, who will, of course, wear theirs of white lace."

"Do you think that Marion feels the difference between her sister's lot and her own?"

"I don't know; she can hardly help feeling it; but if she does, she has too much pride to show her mortification: I suppose that no one would."

"Is Mrs. Ellesmere annoyed at the match?"

"Oh, far from it, I believe; Mr. Atherton is a great favourite of her's; his mother was her dearest friend: but of course she must feel very differently about Matilda's marriage. It is singular, too, that many think Marion the prettiest of the sisters." The conversation of the ladies was here stopped by their arrival in Grosvenor Square.

Lady Sophia was ushered into an elegant drawing-room, where marble and inlaid tables, covered with Sevres china and Bohemian glass, luxurious sofas and sparkling chandeliers, alabaster figures and objects of vertû, appeared reflected in endless perspective in large pier glasses with gilded frames. Lady Sophia could not help thinking of St. Clement's Lane, when Marion rose from the sofa to welcome her.

"Dear lady bride, I am astonished to find you here all alone—actually driven to the dull resource of a book, upon the day before your wedding! Can you manage to keep your thoughts to it for a moment? It must be something singularly amusing! Let me see—'Female Visitor.' Oh!" exclaimed the young lady, with affected horror, dropping the book again upon the sofa, as though its touch would soil her straw-coloured kid, "that is something quite beyond me. Such a book would put me in the dismals, or send me to sleep, before I had read a page of it."

"*You* forget that I am to be a parson's wife," said Marion, with a quiet—Lady Sophia thought a pensive—smile.

"Going to exchange balls and routs, fêtes and concerts, for—"

"Sunday schools and ragged schools, savings banks and clothing clubs," said Marion, concluding the sentence for her.

If the heart of the lady of fashion was capable of the sentiment

of compassion, it certainly felt it now, and she regarded the bride-elect as she might have done some condemned wretch proceeding to the place of execution. She made no observation, however, and indeed had time for none, as the folding-door at this moment opened, and Matilda appeared, followed by two footmen, bearing packages covered with silver paper and sealed with white wax.

"Sophia! oh, I'm delighted to see you; I've been expecting you all this afternoon. You have just come in time to be present at the opening of these two parcels, sent by my uncle Templeton; one is directed to you, Marion; the other is addressed to me."

"It needs no ghost to divine what is in the smaller parcel," said Lady Sophia; "there is an unmistakeable spout—a silver teapot. Was I not a witch?" she exclaimed, as Marion quietly removed the muslin paper.

"What a useful present!" said Marion. "Uncle is really very kind."

"Now for mine," exclaimed Matilda, eagerly tearing off the covering. "Oh, how beautiful! how splendid!" she and Lady Sophia exclaimed at once, as a magnificent ormulu clock was displayed to view.

"It is splendid indeed," said Marion, placing her own less dazzling gift on a different table.

"I wonder that Mr. Templeton did not send you both the same kind of present," remarked Lady Sophia. There was nothing in the observation itself, yet Marion heard it with a slight feeling of pain; she was displeased with herself for that feeling, and replied, with a cheerfulness which was a little assumed: "Matilda's gift speaks of luxury, mine of comfort; one will measure the gay hours at Standishton Park; while the other, I hope, will give me and my husband many a refreshing cup of tea after the duties of the day are over."

It was with mingled feelings that Marion Ellesmere retired to

her room the night before her wedding. A light cloud of self-reproach rested on her mind; a cloud so light that she scarcely knew whence it arose, or would have been aware of its presence but for the shadow which it cast over her spirits. Her sister's smile, as she bade her good night, had been all brightness—why should there be less joy in the heart of the bride of Atherton? With her long fair hair over her shoulders, and her eyes shaded by her hand, Marion sat in her own arm-chair, and gave herself up to thought.

"To-morrow! day long hoped for, and yet half dreaded! I am at last indeed on the eve of that great change which must alter the whole current of my life. What new duties; what responsibilities! But he will ever be near, to guide, to encourage, to make the path of duty delightful to me. I shall lean on him and trust him. I am indeed the most blest of women in his love. I would not change my lot, no, not to be empress of the world. And yet"—Marion heaved a deep sigh, then almost started at the sound of that sigh, alone as she was, with the still night around her; the colour rose to her cheek, as if in indignation at herself—"and yet I am not worthy to be his wife! He, whose spirit is so pure, so lofty, so far above the world and its vanities—could titles, or riches, or anything raise *him?* When I am beside him, how deeply I feel this! I seem to breathe a purer atmosphere, to see things as they really are; but when I am surrounded by others, then—I know not how it is—but there is an influence which they exercise, an almost insensible power: trifles move me; I know them to be folly and vanity, yet I cannot despise them as I ought to do. Oh, how weak I am, how worldly; how unworthy of *him!* Marion sank back on her chair, and her long lashes were moist with her tears.

She sat long, her light burned low, every sound in the house was stilled. Presently the walls of her apartment seemed to

recede around her, with the strange indistinctness of a dissolving view; marble pillars arose on either side, gradually assuming form and size, while the carpet upon which Marion's feet had rested spread into a wide pavement of mosaic. And Marion was no longer alone; a strange form was beside her, of more than human stature, and mien unlike that of mortal man. His long silver hair gave to him the appearance of age, but an unearthly fire glowed in his deep-set eyes, from beneath the white eyebrows which overhung them. His dress was dim and indistinct, ever changing in form and hue; now dark as the lowering thunder-cloud, now like the white mist which curls round the mountain, anon tinged as with the dying tints of the rainbow. In his hand the old man grasped a scythe, sharp and glittering: Marion felt that she was in the presence of old Time.

"Look there!" he exclaimed; and the strange tones of his voice sounded like the wind through the arches of a ruin. Marion beheld before her what appeared a white altar of marble, sculptured and festooned with many-coloured flowers, of a fragance not like those of earth.

"What see you before you?" said Time; "what glitters on yonder marble?"

"I see nothing but piles of bright golden rings, like that which I shall wear to-morrow," replied Marion. It was strange that in the presence of such a companion, she felt neither wonder nor fear.

"And are they all alike?" said old Time.

"All are alike, save that they are divided into four different heaps."

The old man laughed: how wild and unearthly sounded that laugh! "They have been framed by different makers," said he; "I carry the touchstone to prove them. See the first heap—a goodly array I trow: they are Folly's workmanship; while pas-

sionate lovers choose from thence, who would barter life for a flower or a smile. Flatterers and the flattered draw from that pile. Folly gives, and Vanity receives. Poets string their fancies on rings such as these, and lay them at the feet of romance-loving damsels, who look upon life as a drama, of which they themselves are the heroines. Stand back—Althea approaches—she must have a ring from that pile."

Then Marion beheld advancing towards them a youthful couple, radiant with happiness and love. The maiden was surpassing fair; her white veil half concealed her blushing countenance, but her soft eyes were fixed upon her companion, whose every look and tone expressed love the most ardent and devoted. He kissed the white trembling hand upon which he placed the ring, and Marion watched the wedded pair as they slowly retired to a more remote part of the temple. "Surely they are happy," thought she. She was roused by the voice of old Time.

"Mark you the second heap?" said he, pointing with his scythe. "Those rings have been fashioned by Worldliness, ever since my comrade, the Earth, was young. Those who seek money, those who seek rank, who sell themselves for a title or an estate, maidens who dread to become old maids, the fortune-hunter, the ambitious, the proud—these choose from the second heap. Of such is Julia, whose bridal procession is drawing near. Jewels upon her brow, no love within her heart, she gives herself away to a carriage and a mansion, and strives to forget that a fool is their master."

Marion sighed as the procession passed; it is a sickening sight to behold beauty sacrificing to mammon.

"And who formed the rings that shine in the third heap?" said Marion to her mysterious companion.

"They are framed by Self-will, and the Evil One has breathed a spell over them. When the fifth commandment is broken, when a parent's will is despised, when there is clandestine wooing,

and the wedded ones dare not ask God's blessing upon them—then those rings are worn."

Even as he spoke, with fearful, hesitating step a maiden approached the pile, led on, half reluctant, by one of graceful form, who was whispering soft words in her ear. Oh! could it be love that led him to act the part of tempter to the woman who trusted him, or did he fondly hope to find the faithful wife in the undutiful daughter?

"And what is the neglected cluster of rings which no finger yet has touched?" said Marion.

The voice of Time sank to the soft whisper of the western breeze, and milder light shone in his eyes as he replied: "They are for those whose marriages have been made in heaven: every circlet of gold has been formed by Esteem. When two devoted to one service meet, heirs of one hope, followers of one Lord; when, loving and beloved, they would share each other's joys, nor shrink from the burden of each other's sorrows; when, helping each other on a heavenward road, they would press on in the same strength, to the same bright goal above, then those rings unite them here, emblems of that eternity which will unite them in bliss never ending."

A voice behind Marion seemed to echo the last words; she knew that voice, it thrilled to her heart; and she knew the hand that pressed upon hers the pledge of connubial love. Could all the diamonds of Golconda have made it more precious to the heart of the youthful bride?

Then, again, the tones of old Time rose, as the rushing sound of the angry blast. "I come—I come!" he cried. "Thrones melt as snow before me; the peopled city, the obscure village, the home of the peasant, the palace of the monarch, bear the marks of the deep footprints of Time! And mine is the touchstone that tries the gold; it is my hand that draws back the veil of Truth;

I touch the bubbles of Folly, and they break, and leave but a tear behind."

Marion watched, as with stealthy but rapid step Time approached Althea and her husband. Now lines appeared on the fair smooth brow; the glassy ringlets were streaked with gray; the fairy form had lost all its grace. And the ardent lover, how cold was his look!—how changed from the bridegroom was the husband! Time laid his heavy hand upon the ring which still glittered on the finger of Althea; at once the circlet lost all its brightness, the colour changed, the gilding vanished; nought remained but the dull, worthless metal beneath: the ring had never been gold!

Haughty Julia! amid thy wealth and thy state, Time also is stealing on thee. Bars of gold will not bolt him out; he tramples earth's treasures beneath his feet. He touches the ring on the worldling's hand, and the dull, heavy fall of iron is heard. Man may see nought but the loop of gold, but the wearer feels the galling chain. Hopeless and unpitied must she drag its weight; she has chosen her fate, and she must bear it: her ring has never been gold.

With mournful interest Marion watched the steps of the wedded pair, who had sacrificed duty to love. There were looks of suspicion, and words of reproach, as the shadow of Time fell across their path; but when his cold hand touched the fatal ring, a faint cry escaped from the wife's pallid lips: a viper was coiling where the circlet had rested: her ring had never been gold.

And now Marion felt Time approaching herself, yet still she clung to the husband beside her with deeper, more confiding love. Time held out his hand; she did not shrink; she felt his touch, but she trembled not. The ring which she wore grew brighter than ever: it was formed of the gold which changes not in the furnace of trial, or beneath the grasp of Time. And the voice which she loved was sounding in her ears, like soft music from a

sphere above, "For richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part." "Till death us do part," repeated the bride; "united in life, in death, and beyond it." Even as the words burst from her lips, the whole scene appeared to melt before her, the image of Time had vanished; she suddenly opened her eyes, and wondered at the dimness around. The light had burned out in her chamber, wasting itself and dying, like the love which mere earthly attractions inspire; but a soft rosy gleam was now tinging the east, bright harbinger of a brighter radiance: it was the dawn of Marion's wedding-day.

THE END.